

# Something Old. Something Borrowed. Something New.

Heterosexual Cohabitation as Marriage Resistance?

A Feminist Deconstruction.

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*Once you have said it, once you've made that public declaration, then you can forget it. When you're married – well, often even when you aren't married – people lump you together as a couple, rather than as individuals.*

(Susan Sarandon 1996:12)

*Change and continuity are more closely related than many people tend to think. No search is more fruitless than the one that seeks revolutionary forms of social relations which remain 'uncontaminated' by existing social conditions.*

(Weston 1991:210)

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines heterosexual cohabitation as a contested social arrangement that shapes, and is shaped by, power relations that constitute everyday situations. It considers two interconnecting concerns: the variety of meanings given by heterosexual cohabitantes to cohabitation and marriage, and the contextually asserted boundaries of inclusion and exclusion between these categories. The focus is on how these meanings are strategically deployed, together with their symbolic markers, in order to lay claim to particular constructions of the self and their associated rewards and recognitions in specific settings. The examination of this process of management — ‘managing selves’ — forms the central problematic of this thesis.

Cohabitation features in this research as a cluster of ideas, practices and political signals that are taken up according to their perceived utility in negotiating various dimensions of heterosexual coupledness. Specifically, the focus is on how individuals use ‘cohabitation’ as a way of indicating overt resistance to some, but not all, of the conventions of heterosexual marriage. Interviews with women and men illustrate ways in which cohabitation can be defined in contrast to marriage, and used to negotiate domestic and financial practices that differ in some respects from the gendered norms associated with ‘traditional marriages’. In reading these interviews, particular attention is paid to how power is both exercised and resisted through the discursively constructed difference between cohabitation and marriage.

The thesis is comprised of a series of essays that have been written in a form that allows them to be read as stand alone pieces. Focusing on cohabitation as ‘marriage resistance’, each chapter examines the strategic deployment of ‘cohabitation’ (and ‘marriage’) to negotiate the various identities — social, financial, domestic and emotional — that are constituted through heterosexual relationships.



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## CONTENTS

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>v</b>
<i>Chapter 1</i> <b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>Chapter 2</i> <b>A Theoretical Preamble</b>	<b>33</b>
<i>Chapter 3</i> <b>Finding the Man in the Heterosexual Couple</b>	<b>51</b>
<i>Chapter 4</i> <b>Managing Selves I: The Public 'Eye/I'</b>	<b>72</b>
<i>Chapter 5</i> <b>Managing Selves II: The Unruly Consequences of 'Difference'</b>	<b>94</b>
<i>Chapter 6</i> <b>Managing Selves III: Opposing Oppositions</b>	<b>119</b>
<i>Chapter 7</i> <b>Managing Money: A Risky Business?</b>	<b>146</b>
<i>Chapter 8</i> <b>Managing the House: Gender At Home</b>	<b>183</b>
<i>Chapter 9</i> <b>What Has Love Got To Do With It?</b>	<b>225</b>
<i>Chapter 10</i> <b>Conclusion</b>	<b>255</b>
<b>Research Appendix</b>	<b>265</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>268</b>

## INTRODUCTION

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Although cohabitation has commonly been regarded as the rejection of marriage, recent studies suggest that many currently cohabiting relationships are really informal marriages. ... The main distinction, therefore, is not between marriage and an alternative to marriage, but rather between 'those whose marriages are formalised and those whose marriages are not'.

(Mansfield & Collard 1988:4)

In much recent sociological research on changing family forms, it is argued that cohabitation is much like marriage. ... However, there have been few attempts to verify the similarity between cohabitation and marriage empirically. Certainly to political and moral conservatives, they are not the same thing. Cohabitation lacks the formal, public commitment to a long-term responsibility.

(VanEvery 1995b:25-6)

Both of the preceding statements attribute particular meanings to cohabitation and variously construct its relationship to marriage. On the one hand, cohabitation is deemed to be a troublesome alternative to marriage. On the other hand, it is

aligned with marriage – informal or de facto marriage.<sup>1</sup> Without seeking to resolve this controversy, this thesis examines heterosexual cohabitation as a contested social arrangement that shapes, and is shaped by, the power relations that constitute everyday situations. I consider two interconnecting concerns: the variety of meanings given by heterosexual couples to cohabitation and marriage, and the contextually asserted boundaries of inclusion and exclusion between these categories. I focus on how these meanings are strategically deployed, together with their symbolic markers, in order to lay claim to particular constructions of the self and their associated rewards and recognitions within specific settings. I am interested in cohabitation as a strategy of resistance to gendered marital power relations. The examination of this process of management – ‘managing selves’ – forms the central problematic of this thesis.

As such my research departs from the issue raised by Mansfield and Collard (1988), Chandler (1991) and VanEvery (1995b) – that of cohabitation’s essential difference from, or similarity to marriage. Is cohabitation, to all intents and purposes, simply a variant on a standardised theme? Or is it a unique institution awaiting full social recognition? These questions suggest that the task awaiting the social scientist is that of empirical verification, the provisioning of evidence that would enable definitive statements about cohabitation to be made: cohabitation is like ‘this’ or it is like ‘that’.

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<sup>1</sup> A word about terms: although cohabitation literally means to share a dwelling with others, it has become a common term of reference to unmarried couples, particularly heterosexual couples, who live together and share an emotional and sexual bond. I use co-residence as a replacement for the literal meaning of cohabitation. Co-residence is a defining feature of a cohabitational relationship: a break in co-residence is typically taken as an indicator of the termination of the relationship. While it is assumed that married couples will co-reside (or, in more common terms, cohabit), the cessation of their co-residence does not immediately lead to the dissolution of the marital relationship. In New Zealand, marital dissolution requires a separation period of at least two years, the beginning of which is usually marked by the termination of co-residence.

An empiricist emphasis would have made my research more comprehensible to others. Discussing my research during casual encounters with acquaintances, I have found myself repeatedly confronted with an injunction to speak in terms of 'results', as if I had been engaged in the discovery of the distinctive properties of cohabitation as a relational form, henceforth to be recognised by such and such a feature.

I have, however, declined these generous invitations to structure my research in empirical terms. This project, problematic as I believe it to be, has been left for another. I have not produced material that might substantiate claims to the distinctiveness, or otherwise, of cohabitation. Neither have I attempted to generate patterns or create generalised rules that could serve a predictive purpose.

My agenda also deviates from that of Schwartz (1994) whose analysis of marriage seems to have been written in the spirit of a guidebook, albeit with a sociological bent. Description blurs into prescription as Schwartz argues for a particular way of living long-term heterosexual coupledness that she believes will lead to the achievement of rewarding levels of intimacy and long-term happiness (1994:3). Although I chose to cohabit rather than marry during my last long-term relationship, it is not my intention to champion one relational form over others.<sup>2</sup> My interest is in problematising the practices of the cohabitantes with whom I spoke. In this way I have sought to produce a text that will enable people to be more reflexive about their own relational practices, whether cohabiting or married, single, heterosexual, lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Given the current heterosexual definition of marriage, the primary focus of this research is heterosexual couples. Unlike homosexual couples, heterosexual

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to recognise the level of diversity that exists in this domain. After all, there are numerous ways in which people sustain (heterosexual) relationships, both inside and outside of marriage. Some people who are married do not continuously share the same house, or even the same city. Likewise, some cohabitantes would not entertain the idea of sustaining their relationship while living separately.

couples who live together are able to choose whether or not they marry. This possibility forms a significant part of the social context within which heterosexual cohabitantes operate. It makes them potential targets for regulatory pressure and it forms the basis from which their opposition to marriage gains its meaning. Cohabitation, within this context, can symbolise resistance to some of the conventions of heterosexual coupledness. Marriage resistance poses heterosexual couples with a number of unique problems: having abandoned marriage, how do cohabitantes demonstrate commitment? What language do they use to achieve social recognition for themselves and their relationships? Although dominated by discussions of heterosexual cohabitation, issues pertaining to homosexual coupledness are considered at various points throughout this thesis. The introduction of this material serves several purposes: it confirms the existence of debates over the meaning of marriage beyond the confines of heterosexual coupledness; it draws attention to the importance of perspective when assessing resistance; and it illustrates the relevance of the kind of theorisation I undertake within this thesis to the entire field of intimate relationships, including homosexual relationships.

## I

Cohabitation features in this research as a cluster of ideas, practices and political signals that are picked up, and put down, according to their perceived utility in negotiating various dimensions of heterosexual coupledness. As a sociologist, my underlying concern is with cohabitation's effectiveness as an instrument of change and transformation. Specifically, I have been interested in how individuals use cohabitation as a way of indicating overt resistance to some, but not all, of the conventions of heterosexual marriage; hence, cohabitation as marriage resistance. I

explore the strategic potential of cohabitation, note its contradictory effects, and consider the constraints on its efficacy.

Interviews with a set of people in heterosexual relationships illustrate ways in which cohabitation can be defined in contrast to marriage and used to construct identities, and negotiate domestic and financial practices, that differ from the gendered norms associated with traditional marriages. Given this inflection, cohabitation for many heterosexual couples, especially feminists, accrues symbolic value.<sup>3</sup> It can be deployed to signal the existence of qualities like resistance, autonomy, egalitarianism, and unconventionality, amongst other things. As a symbolic marker of difference, cohabitation functions to demarcate other boundaries – between the individual ‘I’ and the coupled ‘we’, for instance – that become salient in the process of managing relationships.

What cohabitation actually symbolises depends upon the particular meanings ascribed to it. Defined in opposition to marriage it may denote immorality – ‘living in sin’ – or resistance to marital norms. Interpreted as ‘quasi-marriage’, cohabitation is reduced to a variant on the marital theme that undermines its challenging edge. This preserves marriage as a privileged construct and marginalises attempts to construct different living arrangements.

Lacking a single referent, the exact meaning of cohabitation is established contextually within ‘everyday situations of conflict’ (Weston 1991:200). The contested character of its meaning is made explicit in the following extract from one of the conversants in this study:

*Michael:* ...I had a bit of a discussion with Geoff and Nicki about this. And they said, oh you know, ‘everything changes when you’re married.’ I said, ‘What?’ ‘Oh it is more of a commitment,’ you know, ‘it’s different.’ I

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<sup>3</sup> Although many of the women I interviewed drew on feminist notions like independence for women, this does not mean that they would necessarily see themselves as ‘being feminists’.

said, 'Well how is it different? I'm committed to Jane', you know. 'I've gone and bought a house. Everything we have is together.'<sup>4</sup>

This excerpt provides an example of how 'marriage' and 'cohabitation' may be strategically deployed to symbolically mark boundaries between other categories of difference: in this instance, the boundary between committed and non-committed relationships. At issue are the conclusions which can be drawn about the commitment of heterosexual couples who live together, but are not married. Michael argues for a severance of the connection between marriage and commitment to permit the inclusion of cohabitation within the category of committed relationships. He appropriates an alternative marker of commitment – jointly owned property – to reinforce his point.

In tracing such disputes over the meaning of cohabitation, I have paid careful attention to the contextual privileging of some meanings over others. The existence of multiple definitions of cohabitation cannot be taken to imply that these meanings enjoy equal standing, or that they are equally available to everyone. Within specific settings, certain meanings are validated at the expense of others. As Brown states, in reference to recent discussions surrounding the issue of heterosexual pleasure: 'we do not live in a free market where volunteering different kinds of meanings for attraction and sex is possible' (Brown 1994:323).

The significance of noting these shifts in meaning lies with the consequences of settling on one definition rather than another. Contests over meaning can have profound implications for the ongoing structure of social power relations through the determination of how identities (both personal and relational) are to be constituted, and how material assets are to be distributed (see Hollway 1989:36; Yeatman 1990:155; Weston 1991:5; Nippert-Eng 1995:xii). Because of the ramifications that can follow from fixing the meaning of a term – be that

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<sup>4</sup> Geoff is Michael's brother, and Nicki (as Geoff's wife) is Michael's sister-in-law.



'cohabitation', 'marriage', or the 'family' – along particular lines, contests over meaning need to be viewed as a form of political activity (Yeatman 1990:155; see also Kondo 1990; Weston 1991; Nippert-Eng 1995). Located in everyday situations, debates over meaning constitute an instance of 'micro-politics', the subject matter of a 'sociology of everyday life' (Nippert-Eng 1995:xiv).

## II

The same-sex marriage debate provides an excellent example of the contested nature of the terrain in which my research is located, the field of personal relationships. By putting into question the meaning of marriage in the late twentieth century, this debate graphically illustrates how a battle over contested terms may be waged.

These disputes were well aired during a current affairs programme, *Fraser*, which screened on prime time television in April 1996.<sup>5</sup> The programme made manifest, in a highly visible manner, the disputed character of a dimension of our lives that we tend to regard as private and personal, rather than public and controversial. The question posed, in the programme and in the High Court hearing (which preceded the programme), was which definition of marriage should prevail. Is the presumed heterosexual character of marriage intrinsic to its meaning, or merely a historical artefact that is no longer warranted? Should the heterosexual rendition of marriage be abandoned in favour of the inclusion of same-sex couples within its embrace, making it possible for same-sex marriages to become an everyday reality? Is marriage primarily about the bearing and rearing

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<sup>5</sup> At the time of the screening of 'Gay Marriage,' media attention, following two separate applications to the High Court of New Zealand for a ruling on the eligibility of same-sex couples to marry under current legislation (Marriage Act 1955), was considerable.

of children? Does it, therefore, mark the intention to form another (nuclear) family unit? Or does marriage indicate the existence of an intimate sexual relationship characterised by 'mutuality, trust and commitment' (Reverend Jim White, *Fraser*, 1996).

At issue in this debate are the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion with respect to marriage, the repercussions of which lie with who is able to lay claim to its symbolic connection to love and commitment, and who is able to benefit from its associated legal rights and obligations. During the televised discussion of this debate a narrow heterosexualised definition of marriage was contested by a number of people who asserted the rights of all couples to be able to legally marry, irrespective of their sexual orientation:

Two people meet. They fall in love. They don't see sexes. They see each other. And they fall in love. What right do you have to say they can't get married? They want to get married. They want to have a lifetime partnership.

(Jess Denim, lesbian woman, audience, *Fraser*, 1996)

I believe in the institution of marriage. And for me now as an adult not to have the same legal rights, responsibilities and protections is ridiculous. Suddenly I have lost a whole lot of my human rights.

(Margy Pearl, High Court Applicant, *Fraser*, 1996)

These statements can be read as interventions into the restrictive application of marriage as a symbol of cultural significance. They represent attempts to lay claim to the symbolic power of marriage in order to manage how relational identities are constructed. They both disrupt and reinforce the status of marriage as an ideal state for couples.

Access to this cultural symbol for lesbian and gay couples is reliant upon the successful displacement of heterosexuality as the primary qualifying condition of marriage. It requires the redrawing of the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion

according to different precepts. To support her case for same-sex marriages, Jess Denim asserts the primacy of love as the sole criteria of eligibility. When love is prioritised, sexual orientation loses its relevance. Confined to a question of love, marriage becomes an inclusive institution, with same-sex marriages an inevitable outcome.

To date, the power of the arguments supporting same-sex marriages have been insufficient to counter the force of heterosexualised versions of marriage. In much the same way as proponents of same-sex marriage couch their claims for a broadened definition through appeals to a third term, defendants of the status quo also appeal to external points of reference to arbitrate the dispute. In the following extract Bruce Logan (NZ Education and Development Foundation) provides marriage with a familiar gloss:

Marriage exists for the welfare of our community and for our culture. ... There has never been any culture in which the family has not been paramount. And neither has there been any culture in which marriage has not been held in high regard as a means of entry into the family. Marriage exists in our culture, and in most other cultures, primarily for the nurturing and protecting of children.

*(Fraser, 1996)*

Defining marriage in procreative terms gives it a biological underpinning that appears to mandate heterosexuality. It is presumed that same-sex couples are incapable of reproduction, and hence that they will not have children. According to this line of reasoning, since the 'laws of nature' appear to have precluded their participation in child bearing and rearing, it follows that lesbian and gay couples should also be excluded from participating in marital rites. This diverts attention from lesbians and gay men who are rearing children in committed relationships which include joint property ownership and shared parenting responsibilities (see Weston 1991).

Opponents of same-sex marriages seek to reify a static meaning of marriage. For instance, Annetta Moran (Deputy Leader, Christian Democrat Party) cast a quick eye over history to provide marriage with a uniform trajectory:

We are seeing here yet another example of the manipulation of language by the gay rights activist movement. ... I think it is a nonsense to say 'same-sex' marriage. Marriage is always between people who are different, a male and a female.

*(Fraser, 1996)*

Her statement, however, ignores the degree to which marriage has been subject to historical and cultural variation, and denies the impact of divorce on how marriage is currently understood.

The preservation of current legislative boundaries is a strategy designed to shelter marriage from a potentially transformative force: same-sex marriages (Stoddard 1992:19; Johnson 1996:44). Stoddard and Johnson both argue that same-sex marriages would undermine the gendered norms of the institution. Just as importantly, the continued prohibition of same-sex marriages prevents same-sex couples from appropriating this cultural symbol in order to accord their partnerships with the same social standing granted to heterosexual marriages.

Contesting the hierarchical ordering of coupled relations is a feature of both the discourse of cohabitation as marriage resistance and the same-sex marriage discourse. Within the discourse of same-sex marriages, this contest is played out through an attempt to lay claim to a key cultural symbol, marriage. The discourse of cohabitation as marriage resistance, on the other hand, constructs marriage negatively in order to reverse the polarity. Cohabitation is, thereby, judged to be a superior relational form. Ironically, in the process of disputing the ordering of relational practices, both marriage resisting cohabitantes and proponents of same-sex

marriage seek to fix the meaning of marriage along particular lines, even as they pose a challenge to its conventions.

### III

One of the dangers of the inquiry that I have undertaken is the possibility of simply duplicating these oppositional manoeuvres. Oppositional thinking leads to the creation of 'cohabitation' and 'marriage' as mutually exclusive categories. It results in their treatment as unitary entities: all marriages are viewed in identical terms, just as all cohabitational relationships become carbon-copies of each other. Framed in this manner, questions about these relational constructs are limited to that of similarity or difference.

Collapsing the distinction in favour of an all-embracing category like 'the Relationship' is also problematic (Burgoyne 1991:246). Derived from therapeutic models, a focus on 'the Relationship' encourages attentiveness to the psychological and emotional dimensions of relationships, while leaving aside more sociologically inspired questions. It suggests that individuals are free to shape their relationships without the hindrance of socially derived meanings. Specifically, it ignores the ways in which the meanings attributed to marriage and cohabitation may impact on how people engage in 'the Relationship'. It ignores questions that are related to the access and distribution of material assets during (and after) a marriage or cohabitational relationship. For instance, is it possible to retain individual entitlement to income support, or is that opportunity foreclosed because the individuals concerned are treated as a couple?

When generalised categories of difference are used the outcome is often reductionist analyses. This is a feature in the work of people like Schwartz (1994) and even Hochschild (1989). Both of these writers produce typologies of

contemporary marriages. For Schwartz, marriages come in one of three varieties: peer, near peer and traditional (1994:2). Similarly, Hochschild posits the existence of three marital forms: egalitarian, transitional and traditional (1989:15). In producing these typologies, Schwartz and Hochschild of necessity engage in simplifications. In the case of Schwartz in particular, the coherence of her categorisation is maintained through the creation of a third category – near peer – to cater for those people who cannot be included within the embrace of the ‘peer marriage’ because of their traditional practices. This is not taken as evidence of the conflicted nature of people’s actions. Rather, it is a symptom of ‘those who admire egalitarian relations between men and women but cannot figure out how to do it’ (Schwartz 1994:2).

Some of these dilemmas also emerge in VanEvery’s work on anti-sexist living arrangements (1995a, 1995b). VanEvery’s definition of what constitutes an anti-sexist living arrangement is tautological:

I concluded that the characteristic common to all of the women in the study was that they were, in different ways and to different extents, resisting and rejecting wifehood.

(1995a:262)

and

By analysing the strategies of resistance to being a wife, we can identify the characteristics of wifehood – dependency, subordination, responsibility for servicing the members of the living arrangement, and for maintaining communal space, and so forth.

(1995a:267)

These definitions produce ‘wife’ as a problematic category. Those who actually are wives in a legal sense must fulfil certain criteria to demonstrate that they are anti-sexist: for example, they do not publicise their marital status (VanEvery 1995a:262-3, 1995b:16 & 21). Demonstrating this, they are immediately jettisoned from the

category; they become not-wives even though they are married. This kind of reasoning continues to provide the identity of wife with a singular definition: wife 'refers to the particular social position of women as subordinates of individual men' (VanEvery 1995b:15). As a consequence, the possibility of rendering 'wife' in egalitarian terms is negated.

VanEvery also builds an expectation of consistency into her study. If being a wife is linked to financial dependence and housewifery, then a commitment to anti-sexism will be evidenced in changes to the allocation of household labour and financial resources (1995b:32, 53 & 111). In making this kind of pronouncement, VanEvery constructs the participants in her study as unitary, self-consciously political actors. This view of the participants in her study is maintained through VanEvery's minimal use of the words of those who participate in her study.

In contrast to the foregrounding of unitary participants and singular definitions within VanEvery's work, my own research has been strongly influenced by the strategy of deconstruction. Deconstruction, through its critique of either/or thinking, emphasises simultaneity, the existence of 'both/and'. Accordingly, the challenge lies in recognising how entities like 'cohabitation' and 'marriage' are, and have been, both constructed and differentiated. It prompts a consideration of how lines of difference are infused with significance, at the same time as they are erased threatening the very possibility of making distinctions. Such thinking disrupts assumptions and suggests complexity. Acts of so-called resistance may entail elements of compliance, while apparently concessionary behaviours may produce disruptive consequences that are unforeseeable (Kondo 1990:224).

Operating from within a deconstructive framework, I have focused on people's strategic utilisation of assumptions about 'cohabitation' and 'marriage' to manage their identities and their positionings in power relations within specific situations. I have been interested in noting how people may do this 'differently in different contexts and for disparate political ends' (Kondo 1990:202). Informed by

such notions, I have anticipated the presence of contradiction and disjunction. A preference for cohabitation, for example, is not necessarily accompanied, with any consistency, by financial and household practices which contrast with the practices assumed by those whose subjectivities are constituted within the discourse of traditional marriage. Practices may or may not differ, just as the actions imbued with symbolic significance may be quite various.

My approach leaves to one side the question of whether or not cohabitation is productive of more egalitarian relationships than marriage. Such a question, from the perspective of deconstructive thought, is fallacious. It assumes the presence of categorical differences, and presumes that power relations have a static and generalisable quality. I would argue that the determination of who is exercising power within any context can only ever be ascertained on a provisional basis.

## IV

I want at this juncture to briefly return to the notion of 'managing' as I consider the relevance of this key metaphor for this thesis. Why did I choose 'managing', a term more closely associated with relations in the work place than in the home? The answer to this question lies with congruence between the implications of this term (the existence of constrained choices and strategic decision-making) and the theoretical orientations of this research.

With its connotations of the more generally recognised political character of public life, 'managing' is suggestive of my interest in the political implications of personal identities and the practices of domestic life. My politicisation of this terrain is in keeping with several recent developments. One of the key tenets of second-wave feminism is encapsulated in the slogan 'the personal is political'. So



armed, contemporary feminists have brought into the political arena many privatised areas of daily life. This shift has been paralleled within sociology and social anthropology by the emergence of micro-politics as an increasingly legitimate focus for research. Within this field, Kondo (1990), Weston (1991), and more latterly Nippert-Eng (1995) have provided innovative analyses that have given direction to my own work.

Linked to ideas about exercising control, 'managing' encourages a view of the people in this study as actors who shape heterosexual identities and practices, rather than merely being passive receptacles. 'Managing' in this sense, is evocative of creativity, a playfulness with the rules of 'prevailing institutional forms' (Game & Metcalfe 1996:26). Yet 'managing' is also redolent of making do, of operating within defined limits. Hence, 'managing' is a term that captures the dual character of a postmodern concept of agency: active negotiation within shifting contexts of constraint (see Kondo 1990; Butler 1991, 1992; Davies 1991; Hekman 1991, 1992; Moore 1994). Constraining influences may be encountered at the level of cultural norms and expectations (about gender, for instance), and/or social practices.

Symbolic markers afford a critical site through which people actively manage the representation of themselves, their relationships, and their practices. The capacity to use symbolic markers in this way resides in their role in delimiting socially constructed boundaries. This is made evident in Jonathon's narrative of the 'milestones' that chart the progression of his changing relationship to his partner, Paula:

*Jonathon:* ... and I guess if you are not married in a relationship you tend to think of it more in terms of landmarks, you know milestones. Like the day we met was obviously the first milestone. And the day that we first touched each other in any way is another milestone. And the day that we actually first had sex is obviously a really big milestone. I think it is fairly widely accepted, I mean it is a gross distinction that there are two kinds of relationships between consenting adults. One of

them is that you are friends, but you don't touch each other's bodies or have sexual intercourse. And then there is the other kind. So it is a point that you have gone beyond.

And then I guess the next one is cohabiting. You know, lots of people have a sexual relationship with someone and don't choose to live in the same house. And then there is cohabiting, I guess you start sharing more and more of your lives. ... And finally, the last really big milestone, as far as I can tell, is having a child. Because once you have done that it really sets the seal on things.

In this extract, Jonathon does not contest culturally dominant meanings, neither does he put these markers to use in innovative ways. Instead, Jonathon produces a raft of symbolic connections to Paula that he offers as alternatives to 'the engagement', 'the wedding' and 'the anniversary'. These 'landmarks' may be used by couples, regardless of their marital status, to signal important transition moments. Jonathon's representation of the markers of coupledness demonstrates one way in which individuals engage with symbolic markers. In strategically deploying symbols, people simultaneously maintain, confound and transform boundaries (see Nippert-Eng 1995:xiii). By foregrounding a particular symbol they may signal such things as compliance or resistance; conservatism or unconventionality; freedom or constriction; equality or subordination; and so forth. Through the (temporary) adoption of significant markers, like the gold wedding ring, individuals can (encourage certain readings of themselves) and their circumstances. In so doing, people comply with regulatory pressures at the same time as they resist social censure.

## V

As a deconstructive inquiry it is fitting that in the previous section I have spoken of agency. The use of agency signals my awareness of the complex character of the negotiations we undertake in the course of everyday life. I have borne in mind Kondo's warning that: '...apparent resistance is riven with ironies and contradictions, just as coping and consent may have unexpectedly subversive effects' (1990:224). Nonetheless, prompted by a concern with the production of new heterosexual forms, I began this project with a contemplation of cohabitation as a strategy of resistance to the gendered norms of 'traditional marriage'. Hence, 'cohabitation as marriage resistance'.

One of the advantages of resistance as a term over agency is that it immediately implies the existence of a context shaped by power relations. 'Resistance', within the foucauldian framework to which I am indebted, operates as a counter-force to the exercise of 'power' (Foucault [1978] 1990:96; 1982:221-5).<sup>6</sup> Often resistance begins with the development of a critique of those institutions and practices which produce inequitable social power relations. Such criticisms enable acts of refusal: 'the refusal to accept the definition of oneself put forward by the powerful' (Janeway, cited hooks 1984:90).

To adequately theorise resistance it is necessary to consider the mechanisms through which power makes its presence felt. Within foucauldian formulations, power is not a noun but a verb, power is exercised and not exclusively owned (Foucault [1978] 1990:90 & 94; Foucault 1982:221; Cooper 1994:437; Jones & Guy 1992:309-10; Melton 1992:81-2). Understood in this manner, our experiences of power/lessness are dependent on our varied and shifting

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<sup>6</sup> I use foucauldian rather than Foucauldian to indicate that although Foucault's writings has been an important source of some of the ideas with which I have been working, they have subsequently undergone modification by myself and others.

positionings within the network of power relations that comprise our social worlds (Jones & Guy 1992:309-10; Sawicki 1991:80); power cannot be automatically read from our locations within particular social categories (of gender or race, for instance).

To suggest a certain fluidity in our experiences of power/lessness is not, contrary to Hartsock's contention (1990:169), to deny that gender, race, class, and sexual relations are structural in the sense that they are embedded in the fabric of many of our social institutions and practices (Weedon 1987:3). Rather, it is to argue that our ability to exercise power within any context is not totally determined by our positions within one or more of these sets of relations, but is the outcome of our positionings at the interstices of a complex web of power relations that includes, but not exclusively, relations of gender, sex, race and class (Sawicki 1991:80).

The commonsense notion of power as a primarily repressive force – something that says 'no' – is countered in foucauldian theory by an emphasis on the productive potentialities of power (Foucault 1980:59 & 119). The major vehicle through which power is exercised is the production and deployment of discourse (Foucault 1980:93; Weedon 1987:113-4). Discourses, in this thesis, are defined as culturally and historically specific signifying practices that 'systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1972:49; see also Scott 1988a:34; Valverde 1991:174; Fraser 1992:61).

Among the objects constituted through discourses are subject positions or subjectivities (Weedon 1987:34; Henriques et al. 1984:236). (That is, different discourses make available different ways of being – subjectivities – for individuals to take up (Weedon 1987:34; Henriques et al. 1984:236).) The subject positions produced by a discourse always stand in a relationship of power and/or powerlessness to other subject positions created within the same discourse, or to subjectivities offered within alternative, competing discourses (Henriques et al. 1984:236; Weedon 1987:95). Thus, the acquisition of subjectivity is central to the

contestation, or reproduction, of existing social relations. Those subjectivities that support the status quo are both more readily available (because they are institutionalised as a social 'truth') and their uptake is actively encouraged by those who stand to benefit (however variously this might be construed) from this outcome (Kondo 1990:26 & 29; Sawicki 1991:25 & 80). In accepting dominant subject positions, individuals act to perpetuate the circulation of the discourse that produces them as subjects, and thereby to increase its power (Weedon 1987:34, 97 & 112). As Flax succinctly puts it: 'the individual that power has constituted becomes the vehicle for power' (1990:207).

Yet it is not inevitable that, as socially constituted subjects, we will conform to the status quo. As individuals who are produced across a range of conflicting discourses, and re/positioned as subjects within discourse each time we think or speak, our subjectivities are precarious and contradictory (Weedon 1987:33; Gavey 1989:465). Furthermore, as competent social actors we are able to recombine discursive elements to produce new discourses and new subjectivities (Hekman 1991:59; Valverde 1991:183; see also Henriques et al. 1984:105-6). Consequently, the resistance of subject positions that jeopardise the realisation of objectives formulated through our previous constitutions is always conceivable, if not always achieved in practice.

Resistance is not only the negation of power, that which refuses power's productive tendencies. Resistance is similar to power in that it is also productive: it produces discourses and subjectivities which can be utilised to contest and struggle against those discourses which legitimate domination, exploitation and subjection by the powerful. For example, some heterosexual women have been prompted by their desire to resist their inscription within marital discourse to engage in the production of the still emergent discursive practice of 'cohabitation as marriage resistance'. However, it needs to be noted that the ascription of a practice as oppositional, and therefore resistant, is dependent on one's location within a

network of power relations which makes available certain subject positions while also designating other positions out-of-bounds. In other words, when assessing the resistant status of a practice, a contextual appraisal is required. In the context of the social dominance of the institution of marriage, the assertion of cohabitation as (potentially) an oppositional practice makes sense. Yet in certain sub-cultures cohabitation can acquire the status of a norm, and here marriage might be construed as a form of resistance to the operation of power within that sub-culture.

## VI

My interest in how individuals engage with cultural symbols to actively construct their identities meant that I wanted to talk at length with particular people about their relationships. I was interested in the meanings they gave to their choices and actions, and the choices and actions of others. With this agenda in mind, I chose informal in-depth interviewing as my research strategy. The interviews were conversational in style. Usually I initiated the thread of our dialogues. At other times, it was their lead that we followed. This format was supportive of the kind of collaborative exploration of people's relationships that I sought. It enabled the conversants and myself to delve deeply and proved to be a rich source of insights.

The interviews took place in Dunedin<sup>7</sup> in the second half of 1991 and into early 1992. I sought women who were living with their male partners, who might have something critical to say about marriage, and who would be willing to talk to me about their relational lives. During the process of interviewing these women I also contacted half of their male partners for an interview. In total, I interviewed 24 people: 16 women and 8 of their (male) partners. In some instances, these

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<sup>7</sup> Dunedin is the southern most city of New Zealand. It has a population of approximately 100,000 people. Over the last fifteen years, the economy of the city has become increasingly reliant on the tertiary education sector.

people were already known to me. Others were contacted through the grape-vine: they were friends of friends of mine. The women I interviewed did not always define themselves as feminists, although in speaking critically on marriage all of them drew on feminist discourses. The interviews were conducted in a variety of places: their home; my home; places of paid work. Most of the interviews lasted one hour, many two hours. All of the interviews were taped and later transcribed in full. Each person received a copy of the transcript of the interview for checking and clarification, except for Trish and Rick (a couple whom I interviewed together), and also Jean. For these three, rapidly changing personal circumstances meant that I was unable to return their transcripts to them. As a result, I decided to exclude material from their interviews. This study, therefore, draws on the interviews of 14 women and 7 men. The form in which excerpts appear here is slightly altered to make reading easier. To protect the anonymity of the participants all of their names have been changed, as have other characteristics that might facilitate identification.

At the time of the interviews, all bar one woman (Anya) were involved in live-in heterosexual relationships. None of the people I spoke to had been previously married, however, quite a few of them had had other 'significant' relationships. Barbara's partner, Matthew (who I did not interview), was divorced. The duration of their current relationships varied from 4 to 11 years. One couple announced their plans to get married while I was doing this research. My separate interviews with them greatly aided my ability to think about the strategic potentials of cohabitation and marriage. Conversations with Olivia and Steve provides the bulk of the material for Chapter six, which contains a deconstructive appraisal of 'marriage resistance'. My interview with Olivia prompted me to talk with Anya. When I interviewed her, Anya had been married to Richard for three years and was pregnant with their first child. Had I decided to interview both married and

cohabiting couples material from this interview would have proved highly valuable.

Five of the twelve cohabiting couples represented within this study had a child (or children). All of the children were under the age of 10, and most were under 5. None of these children were the offspring of previous relationships. The women who participated in this study ranged in age from 22 to 34, although most were in their late 20s to early 30s. The men I interviewed were aged from 26 to 37 (although Matthew, Barbara's partner whom I did not interview, was 44). All of the men within my study were partners of women who also participated in the research. Interviews with them took place after I had interviewed the women, and after I had ensured that the women felt comfortable with me interviewing their partners: because Barbara withheld her permission I was unable to interview Matthew.

It was not my initial intention to interview men. At the outset of the interviewing phase, I still visioned feminist sociology as research 'for' and 'on' women. However, about mid-way through the series of interviews, on the advice of my main supervisor, I began to interview the partners of the women who were participating in this study. In hindsight, I am glad that I heeded her advice. The value of this material to my project is explicitly discussed in Chapter three.

As a thesis structured around the contemplation of particular issues and problems, not everyone I interviewed appears in each chapter. Instead, people weave in and out on the basis of whether their talk adds complexity or clarity to the points under consideration. Women's voices dominate the text, although they do not appear at all in Chapter three. Chapter six is almost entirely comprised of extracts from Olivia and Steve's interviews.

Irrespective of whose voices are present, the style of their inclusion remains consistent throughout the thesis. In contrast to VanEvery (1995b), whose presentation of interview material is very sparse, material from the interviews I



undertook is introduced at regular intervals, often appearing in the form of lengthy extracts. Such an approach to the inclusion of extracts meshes with my interest in contradiction and complexity, rather than the production of generalisations or distinctive categories. The interviews provided me with a point of departure and stimulated my thoughts. They have acted as the basis for my interpretations, analyses and critiques. Including their words affords readers the opportunity to 'hear' these voices in context. It also offers readers the chance to consider alternative interpretations and to engage actively with my analysis of talk about 'marriage resistance'.

In producing my readings of the interviews I have paid considerable attention to the details of these texts. In part, this is the outcome of my objection to accounts that fail to acknowledge the complexity and contradiction characteristic of everyday situations. It is also reflective of the kind of discourse analysis I have undertaken. How the term 'discourse' is understood and activated in 'discourse analysis' is not homogeneous. My own use is moulded by the foucauldian definition of 'discourse' provided earlier, and owes much to the way in which Gavey used it to problematise the issue of consent within heterosexual sex (1989, 1990). Gavey's pioneering use of discourse analysis within the New Zealand context offered a local model of the approach that I wished to take. Her analysis of interview texts is similarly attentive to how discourses position women in relation to male (sexual) partners. Unlike Gavey, however, my work focuses more explicitly on people's active management of their discursive locations as they engage in the task of self-representation and relational negotiation.<sup>8</sup>

Discourses are not reducible to utterances or to 'whatever people happen to be saying' or writing (Hollway 1989:38; see also Barrett 1991:125). Instead, the reverse is the case. Textual productions, whether these are written or spoken, are

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<sup>8</sup> I pay attention to some of the practical aspects of engaging in discourse analysis in the Research Appendix.

comprised of the 'various discourses available in the social, cultural, and historical context of the author' (Gavey 1989:465). The text of an interview, like all other texts, can therefore be read to identify the discourses that are present both within the text itself, and more generally within the social environment as a whole.

The purpose of discourse analysis, underpinned by foucauldian feminist theory, is not simply the identification of the discourses contained within a piece of interview text. Discourse analysis examines texts for the ways in which particular discourses construct meaning out of experiences and considers the implications of these meanings for gender power relations (Gavey 1989:466-8; Weedon 1987:41). This type of analysis moves beyond the boundaries of a particular text to a consideration of the social consequences of constituting reality through the discourses contained within that text. (Of course, as I have already stated, what people say and write is itself a social product because these utterances are comprised of the discourses available to individuals within their particular social contexts, including those through which they have passed but to which they no longer belong (Yeatman 1990:164). Thus discourse analysis involves a double commentary on the social: it identifies and names discourses, which are by definition social products, and it analyses these discourses in terms of the effect they have on social power relations (Gavey 1989:467).

## VII

This thesis has been written as a series of essays which, while thematically connected, are relatively autonomous. Focusing on cohabitation as 'marriage resistance', each chapter explores the strategic deployment of 'cohabitation' (and 'marriage') to negotiate the various identities – social, financial, domestic, and emotional – that are constituted through heterosexual relationships. To avoid the

continual restatement of my research agenda and approach, these issues are canvassed in this and the following chapter. Chapters one and two provide the theoretical and methodological context for the debates about heterosexual cohabitation which are set out in subsequent chapters.

Chapter two, in particular, sets the theoretical stage for my work. In it, I draw on foucauldian and other postmodern accounts of power and subjectivity to elaborate a theory of resistance and agency. I also take a more detailed look at how I have approached the task of discourse analysis as I explore my understanding of deconstruction. This is followed in Chapter three by a closer look at some of the methodological questions raised by doing feminist sociology. In this chapter I also consider the place of men as subjects within feminist research and illustrate the value of interviewing men through a detailed analysis of some of the transcripts of these interviews.

In Chapter four, I examine the way 'cohabitation' was used by the women I interviewed to challenge conventional marital discourses. The pivotal target of their critique of marriage was the identity of 'wife'. For many, the idea of becoming a 'wife' posed a threat to their ongoing representation of themselves in autonomous terms. To substantiate this claim, these women referred to the historical, and the still largely prevalent, practices of marital naming. In distancing themselves from the troublesome identity of 'wife', some of the women I interviewed sought to alter the gendered character of heterosexual togetherness.

Chapter five explores the use of discursively produced categories of difference as resources for the construction of contextually asserted identities. I argue that 'doing difference' is an important way in which individuals engage in the micro-politics of everyday life. Within my current frame of reference, 'doing difference' entails both the negotiation of the boundary between cohabitation and marriage, and the disputes over what it means to be located within either of these categories. I consider what is at stake for marriage resisting cohabitantes in

preserving a distinction between cohabitation and marriage. I also note how the contextual appropriation by cohabitantes of some of the symbols and conventions of marriage operates to blur the line of difference, and consequently their ability to construct themselves as resistant actors.

The deconstructive aims of my research is furthered in Chapter six. By tracing Olivia's decision to marry I note the limitations of cohabitation as a tool used to produce egalitarian heterosexual relationships. Olivia's transition to marriage is no simple affair. It represents an attempt on her behalf to manage her relational identity by drawing on aspects of both cohabitation and marriage. Her recrafting of what it means to marry undermines the distinctiveness of cohabitation, even as the significance of Olivia's act depends on the different symbolic potential of marriage to enable reconstruction of the terms of her relationship with Steve.

The next two chapters engage with the practical details of co-residency. In Chapter seven I consider the implications of the adoption of monetary practices that are designed to produce equality and autonomy. Although I briefly examine the use of 'joint' systems of money management, the primary focus of this chapter is on what has been called 'independent money management'. I take note of the gains sought through this practice and examine whether these goals are actually achieved through this strategy. The importance of this work lies in its explication of the avenues for the continuing exercise of power through allocative systems designed to resist the disabling effects of financial dependency.

In Chapter eight, I look at how cohabitation was deployed by some of the women in particular to indicate a refusal of the gendered domestic order that normatively defines marriage. Domestic work offers plenty of scope for the emergence of symbolic acts that can be utilised to construct certain versions of ourselves, selves that contest (or reinforce) gendered norms. I give consideration to the way cohabitantes use symbolic acts relating to the distribution of domestic work

(including child-care) to manage the task of self-representation, including that of the presentation of a resistant self.

Chapter nine explores the emotional terrain of heterosexual relationships. I focus on how the variable placements of cohabitation within the discourse of romantic love affects how power is exercised in a relationship. Once again my interest is in the meanings attributed to cohabitation and marriage, and the relational arrangements which constitute the emotional heart of a relationship.

## A THEORETICAL PREAMBLE

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...the postmodern casts doubt upon the possibility of a 'new' that is not in some way already implicated in the 'old'.

(Butler 1992:6)

My purpose in this chapter is the elaboration of the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis. I return to the concepts I introduced in the previous chapter to provide a more extensive discussion. In particular, I draw on foucauldian feminism and other postmodern writings to explicate the following terms: discourse, subjectivity, resistance, and deconstruction. This material, while presented in a highly abstract manner in this chapter, is given a concrete form within the rest of the thesis as I reflect on the interview texts of the people with whom I spoke. The theory discussed in this chapter provides a set of resources that I draw on as I analyse the interview material. It is in these moments, as I pay attention to aspects of the discourses of cohabitation and marriage, that I expand upon the ideas presented in this preamble.

# I

I want to begin this discussion with an elaboration of the definition of 'discourse' that I provided within the previous chapter. Attention to 'discourse(s)' forms a crucial aspect of this thesis. The term refers to both verbal and visual signifying practices (Foucault 1972:49) or 'meaning constituting systems' (Scott 1988a:34; Valverde 1991:174). As 'meaning constituting systems', discourses are comprised of particular groupings of culturally available signs; or more precisely, of signifiers (words) whose meanings (signifieds) are generated by the discourse in which they are located (Weedon 1987:233; Grosz 1989:xxi; Hollway 1989:50-3). Yet discourses are not simply collections of signs. Discourses can be likened to competing cultural codes 'that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1972:49; see also Foucault [1970] 1973:xix; Weedon 1987:24, 34 & 108). The objects constituted within a discourse include things or people (e.g. couples), subject positions (e.g. intimate partners) and practices (e.g. cohabitation) (Foucault 1972:115, 1991:58; Cain 1993:76).<sup>1</sup>

In the course of producing 'objects', discourses create rules of differentiation or 'grids of specification' (Foucault 1972:42; see also Hollway 1989:39; Davies & Harré 1990:47; Nippert-Eng 1995:xi) without which distinctions between the objects constituted within discourses could not be made. Discourses contain classificatory systems that define and establish relations between 'objects' on the basis of the presence or absence of characteristics that are seen as salient within the terms of that discourse. For example, marital discourse differentiates between former, current and pre-marital states to produce an 'ex', a 'spouse', and a 'fiancé/e'. Typically, the beginning of each of these states is marked by a public 'event'. The lines of distinction contained within a discourse are therefore

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<sup>1</sup> In the paragraphs that follow I intend to continue to use 'object' to embrace all of these aspects.

fundamental to our ability to attribute meaning to an 'object' (Hollway 1989:39). It is through these discursively produced distinctions that we are able to name ourselves and others, to designate similarity and difference, and hence to sort objects into exclusionary categories that can be ordered hierarchically (Foucault [1970] 1973:xix). Such lines of distinction are seldom benign. As Foucault states:

Every relationship of power puts into operation differentiations which are at the same time its conditions and its results.

(Foucault 1982:223)

Clearly, the differentiations made available to us through discourses have political effects: they act to dis/establish power relations and the material practices that support these relations (Foucault 1982:223; see also Foucault [1978] 1990:94; Weedon 1987:113; Sawicki 1991:22).

Discourses that offer competing meanings, and/or competing lines of distinction, and/or competing relations between the objects constituted within a discourse, are located within discursive fields.<sup>2</sup> Family relationships, their parameters and obligations, are an example of a discursive field. In New Zealand, Pakeha discourses construct family relationships in largely nuclear terms, whereas those of Maori revolve around the notion of whanau, an extended family concept. Within any discursive field some discourses have greater power than others (Weedon 1987:35). This can be witnessed through the structuring of institutions, social practices and subjectivities in accordance with these discourses (Weedon 1987:35).

The power, however, of a single discourse to govern the production of identities, practices and power relations constituted within a discursive field is under constant challenge (Weedon 1987:35; Fraser 1992:52-3). Oppositional discourses contest the meanings given to a distinction and/or the classificatory

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<sup>2</sup> Weedon defines a discursive field as consisting of competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organising social institutions and processes (1987:35).



system that produces the grounds for making that distinction in the first place. For instance, some of the marriage resisting cohabitantes included within this study rejected the view that their relationships were simply temporary affairs lacking in the long-term commitment attributed to marital relationships. In so doing, they constructed 'cohabitation' as both similar to, and different from, 'marriage'. By contesting and constructing the meaning of 'cohabitation' they discursively produced it as an 'object'.

Another way of approaching the question of 'discourse' is to conceive of discourses as knowledges (that compete for the status of truth), along with the social practices and subjectivities they produce. Foucault has referred to discourses as *régimes* of truth (Foucault 1980:51-2 & 131; see also Weedon 1987:108). Discourses, as *régimes* of truth, function as the true, not because they are demonstrably true in an objective sense, but because they come to be accepted as true (Foucault 1980:131). In becoming socially recognised as true, discourses (or *régimes* of truth) gain sufficient power to produce their version of reality. In other words, the concept of discourse as a *régime* of truth makes reference to the interdependence of power and knowledge that Foucault represents through his power/knowledge configuration (Foucault 1980; see also Fraser 1989; McNay 1992). Thus, the struggle for power is simultaneously a struggle for the truth (Foucault 1980:51-2, 93 & 131-3).

In the battle for the status of truth appeals are frequently made to the truth and authority of discourses located in other discursive fields (Scott 1988a:35). Hence, those who have wanted to bolster the power of marriage as a heterosexual institution have sought to establish the 'truth' or 'naturalness' of this discourse by looking to biological knowledges on reproduction, and also to some Christian discourses which label all other coupled relations as illegitimate.

Powerful discourses, like that of sexual monogamy, operate as regulatory mechanisms. Through the dual processes of classification and differentiation, *régimes* of truth distinguish between the 'normal' and the 'abnormal', the 'socially

acceptable' and the 'socially unacceptable' (Foucault 1980:131-3). Thus discourses, as régimes of truth, are an integral component of normalisation: that is, of the production of subjects in accordance with discourses that reproduce existing power relations (Flax 1990:207).

The power of a specific classificatory schema to define an object is derived from the discursive battles that take place in everyday interactions (Scott 1988a:35; Kondo 1990:10 & 206). But the meanings so derived can only ever be provisional, the result of a temporary fixing of meaning within the terms offered by the victorious discourse. Shifts in context, or changes to the power relations that constitute a setting, can lead to new discursive settlements, to the deployment of alternative lines of contrast that institute different meanings and consequently different political effects. Contextual shifts resulted in cohabitantes defining cohabitation as both different from and similar to marriage. For instance, they might adhere to the former meaning within the confines of their relationships, but insist on the later meaning during social interactions with family members or colleagues.

These disputes over meaning form the basis of what Kondo calls a 'politics of classification' (1990:206), and Yeatman refers to as a 'politics of discourse' (1990:155). What is at stake in the politics of discourse is the power to construct reality, including subjects and the relationships that exist between them, in accordance with the classificatory schema of a preferred discourse (Yeatman 1990:155). Thus political actors, of all descriptions, need to pay critical attention to the way in which discourses structure reality. They/we need to ask: what lines of contrast are invoked by a discourse to enable boundaries to be drawn between, for instance married and unmarried couples? How are these boundaries socially marked? What other lines of distinction might be invoked to produce alternative patterns of inclusion and exclusion? What are the political consequences of the original and redrawn boundaries? (see Kondo 1990:206). The focus of a 'politics of

discourse' is not absolute difference, but how that difference is established and put to use within specific contexts to produce certain results.

To help elucidate the points made within this section I would like to briefly consider the discursive field of marriage. In western culture, at this moment, marital discourses function to establish primary relationships between a woman and a man that are recognised and regulated by the state. Marital discourses, whether 'traditional' or 'modern', therefore create a distinction between married and non-married couples. Furthermore, marriage, in its legally defined form, distinguishes between heterosexual and homosexual couples such that the latter are blocked from experiencing the privileges and penalties of legal marriage (Sherman 1992; Weston 1991).

These distinctions are not value neutral. Married couples enjoy a number of legal and social benefits that are extended on a piece-meal basis to cohabiting heterosexual couples, but hardly ever to homosexual couples.<sup>3</sup> Yet, the dominant rendition of marriage as a heterosexualised institution is not accepted unilaterally. In a marginalised alternative discourse on same-sex marriage the heterosexual parameters of marriage are rejected, as is its assumed superiority (Sherman 1992; Weston 1991). Within the same-sex marriage discourse the distinction between homosexual couples and heterosexual couples is erased so that the right to marry and enjoy its attendant privileges are extended to homosexual couples (Sherman 1992; Weston 1991).

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<sup>3</sup> Some of the benefits I am thinking of here include the right to adopt a partner's child; to resident status; and to a share in the property acquired during the relationship when that relationship ends by way of agreement or death.

## II

An arena of crucial significance within any politics of discourse is the construction of subjects. Discourses make available subject positions (Foucault 1972:115; Foucault 1991:58; see also Hollway 1984:236; Weedon 1987:34, 92 & 109), or 'I-slots' for individuals to take up (Spivak, cited Fuss 1989:34). These 'I-slots' are situated in relations of power and powerlessness to other 'I-slots' (Hollway 1984:236; Weedon 1987:34). Each discourse produces a range of preferred 'I-slots' some of which may be restricted to those who are of the 'right' gender, sexual orientation, race and/or class (Weedon 1987:95; Hollway 1989:4; Valverde 1991:182). Hence, the rules of contrast of a discourse delimit which subject positions are made available to whom, and on what basis. For instance, in traditional marital discourse when a woman marries she loses access to the position of 'lover' (unless she is also involved in an extra-marital affair) and becomes a 'wife' instead.

Even when access to an 'I-slot' is not denied by virtue of an individual's location within discourses of gender, sexual orientation etc., the way in which a particular 'I-slot' is occupied may not necessarily be the same for individuals of the same social group (Spivak, cited Fuss 1989:34). The manner in which we occupy any position is invariably affected by both current, and previous, discursive locations (Davies & Harré 1990:52; Yeatman 1990:52; Valverde 1991:183).

The production of our/selves as social subjects is therefore reliant on the elaboration of discursively constituted differences (Davies & Harré 1990:47; Kondo 1990:44; Butler 1992:12). It is a never-ending process that necessitates the continual deployment of variably constructed boundaries between the self and others (McNay 1992:174; see also Kondo 1990:24-5, 29 & 31). As Trinh states: 'If you can't locate the other, how can you locate yourself?' (1991:73). Thus, the construction of a sense of our/selves depends on our taking up of subject positions that are presented as discrete entities through the invocation of a line of contrast that

Agency - see (5)  
 - that 'subject' means (1)  
 - that 'other' is (2)  
 - used (3)  
 - e.g. from (4)  
 - then... multiple selves (5)  
 - difficult to change

separates the self from the 'other' (Horowitz 1987:62; Weedon 1987:97; Butler 1992:12). The construction of gendered selves, of men and women, is a prime example of this.

These acts of differentiation signal the centrality of the exercise of power in the constitution of subjects (Foucault 1982:208; Weedon 1987:113; Gavey 1989:464; Kondo 1990:10, 24 & 43; Butler 1992:12-3). According to foucauldian theory, the acquisition of subjectivity implies both being a subject, an individual who is empowered to act, and being sub/jected, an individual whose actions are defined for them by the terms of the discourse from which their status as subjects is derived (Foucault 1980:97-98, 1982:212; Weedon 1987:33-4, 112 & 119; Davies 1991:46, 1992:58 & 63-4)<sup>4</sup> In accepting a subject position we are provided with culturally meaningful ways of experiencing ourselves and our interactions with other people (Weedon 1987: 33 & 97). Yet, the action of constitution also entails confinement to the terms of one's constitution and the denial of access to alternative ways of experiencing ourselves (Foucault 1982:208 & 212; Horowitz 1987:62; Weedon 1987: 34, 112 & 119; Trinh 1989:95; Kondo 1990:18; Butler 1992:12-3).

It would, however, be a mistake to think that we are always aware, consciously or otherwise, of the constraining effect of the discursive construction of our/selves. Becoming a subject entails the development of an emotional and bodily investment in that particular version of the self (Weedon 1987:112; Davies 1991:46, 1992:57). It means that we identify with that subject position, understand it as our own, and come to see the world from that vantage point (Weedon 1987:112; Davies & Harré 1990:46-7; Davies 1992:57).

The impact of the exercise of power on the formation of subjects is not limited to the structure of the discursively produced self, it also influences the range and meanings of the subject positions made available within any social

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<sup>4</sup> This second aspect of what it means to be a subject is denoted within this thesis by the use of 'sub/ject'.

context. One of the privileges that accrues to those who are constituted as powerful within a particular setting is the power to confer legitimacy on specific discourses and the subject positions constituted within them (Foucault 1982:212; Weedon 1987:95). This way of the exercising power encourages the up-take of certain positions, even as the acceptance of other competing subjectivities is made more difficult (Foucault 1982:221; Weedon 1987:100; Kondo 1990: 10 & 25-6; Moore 1994:66-7). Thus the use by New Zealand Income Support Services of a discourse that constructs heterosexual couples as economic entities can make it very difficult for heterosexual individuals to be both economically independent (when this would require access to state funded benefits) and members of a co-residing couple. The subject positions that are most readily available to us are found within dominant, or institutionalised, discourses and often serve to confirm existing power relations (Weedon 1987:109-11). Frequently such positions appear 'natural': their inevitability makes them almost unquestionable (Weedon 1987:75-7). Rich (1980) suggests that this is the case with heterosexuality.

Contextual shifts in the configuration of power relations, however, may foster the assertion of a different self (Kondo 1990:29). In response to shifting power relations, many of the cohabitees with whom I spoke engaged in the selective utilisation of cohabitational and marital discourse to construct their identities:

*Vivienne:* There are a variety of terms that can be used to introduce someone like Paula, what do you usually use?

*Jonathon:* ...It depends on who I am talking to. Say if Paula goes to town and drops something off to be fixed and then I pick it up I might go there and say, 'I am Jonathon Taylor. My wife brought in so-and-so yesterday to be picked up, her name is Paula Morgan. It is just the easiest term, because all the others are a bit weird.

This kind of manoeuvring promotes a view of the self as provisional, relational, multiple, and contradictory (Weedon 1987:33; Kondo 1990:24, 29 & 47; Valverde 1991:182; Fraser 1992:52).

The subject of foucauldian feminism is, therefore, open to the continual flux of shifting discursive locations (Weedon 1987:33, 97 & 112; Gavey 1989:465; Fuss 1989:34-5; Valverde 1991:182; Fraser 1992:52). Produced within discourse, the foucauldian subject can never reach a point of being able to say that s/he is fully and finally produced as an individual that is henceforth unalterable (Weedon 1987:33, 97 & 112; Valverde 1991:182; Fraser 1992:52).

The preceding statements need to be read with caution. While subjects may not be finally fixed, they are nevertheless the result of repeated positionings that lead to what I have called 'sedimentary subjectivity'. Sedimentation occurs when, over a long period of time, perhaps since birth, 'I-slots' are consistently occupied and are thus incorporated into the 'structure of the self' (Bartky 1988:77; see also Weedon 1987:106; Davies 1990:49).<sup>5</sup> Sedimentary subject positions (because of the intense emotional attachment that surrounds them) cannot be readily abandoned or exchanged for other 'I-slots' without posing a threat to the integrity of the self. The notion of ourselves as irrevocably gendered individuals, either masculine or feminine, but generally not both, provides a good example of this (Flax 1990:26).

In spite of the tendency within preceding paragraphs to discuss subject positions as if they existed as discrete entities, it is not possible to produce a taxonomy of the subject positions that comprise a particular individual's subjectivity (Fuss 1989:34). To conceive of the subject in this manner is to engage in an over simplification (Fuss 1989:34; Yeatman 1990:164; Valverde 1991:183). It is

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<sup>5</sup> By 'structure of the self' I mean not only that certain subject positions are integral to our sense of ourselves, but also that the distinctions that are the basis for delineating these subject positions are learned and deployed in our interactions with others (see Bartky 1988:77; Davies & Harré 1990:47). Flax discusses a similar concept but refers to it as our 'core' self (1990:218-9), in my view a problematic term.

important to recognise that any delineation of the subject positions made available through discourse is a necessary abstraction. This is not to say that such abstractions are not significant or politically interesting, but it is to acknowledge that abstracted 'I-slots' are insufficient in and of themselves to explain people's actions (Valverde 1991:183). In the reality of our everyday worlds people exist as complex mixes of subject positions that merge together, contradict each other, and fade in and out of view with shifts in context (Valverde 1991:183; Kondo 1990:44; Fraser 1992:52). It is the assumption of this mix, the associated tensions and contradictions, the unpredictability, that is of interest.

### III

Although the constitution of our/selves is fundamentally affected by power, this does not mean that who we are is wholly determined by the exercise of power (Weedon 1987:41, 95 & 110-1; Butler 1990:29 & 142-7, 1992:12-3; Hekman 1991:47-8 & 51). According to Foucault the potential for resisting power always exists, even if that potential is not always realised in resistant acts (Foucault [1978] 1990:95-6, 1982:221-2; see also Henriques et al., 1984:115; Sawicki 1991:24-5). For Foucault, resistance is the irreducible opposite of power (Foucault [1978] 1990:96), and it comprises isolated acts of rebellion as well as organised political movements (Foucault [1978] 1990:96; see also de Lauretis 1986:3; Fraser 1992:52-3; Melton 1992:84).

Resistance to the exercise of power at the level of subjectivity can arise through a number of different mechanisms. To begin with, the subject formed within discourse is a non-unitary subject: s/he is the product of her constitution, both in previous settings and in the current context, within the multiple discourses that converge on her and compete for her allegiance (Weedon 1987:33 & 109-11; Davies & Harré 1990:52; Yeatman 1990:164; Hekman 1991:59; Valverde 1991:182).



The result, as I have already noted, is a contradictory subject, a subject whose multiple locations cannot be simply knitted together to create a seamless whole. These contradictory subject positions give rise to tension, and the possibility of resisting and contesting certain renditions of the self (Weedon 1987:125; Melton 1992:83-4). It is therefore possible to continue asserting a self that has been acquired in another context in defiance of efforts to encourage the relinquishment of that subject position in the current setting. For example, in the environment of the Bar in which I used to work part-time I resolutely asserted my 'academic' self in the face of attempts by members of the legal profession who frequented the Bar to constitute me as 'merely a barperson'.

Alternatively, resistance may entail the use of one discourse against another to contest its exclusionary outcomes thereby forcing a redrawing of its boundaries to permit inclusion (Weedon 1987:95 & 109; Valverde 1991:183; see also Weston 1991). In the following extract, Anya draws on feminist discourses to contest the construction of the wedding ceremony as one in which only men speak formally:

*Anya:* ...I decided that I was going to say something too. I thought, 'Why don't I say something?'

*Vivienne:* This was at the—

*Anya:* breakfast yeah. So I did that and that was quite good. I was a bit nervous for a start, but ... it just occurred to me that all these men are giving all these speeches ... why don't I say something, because it is my marriage just as much as it is Richard's. And there is a woman coming into this just as much as there is a man.

Resistance can also take the form of the deployment and reworking of cultural distinctions that constitute us as particular kinds of selves in order to attach different meanings to these selves (Butler 1990:45, 1992:12-3). This form of resistance entails a taking up, and a reversing, of the rules of contrast that are contained within a discourse in order to contest the meanings previously attributed

to these distinctions (Butler 1990:45, 1992:12-3). In this case, 'difference' becomes a resource that enables resistant acts to take place (Sawicki 1989:187; Kondo 1990:202).

Additionally, resistance may be achieved through the manipulation by individuals, acting alone or in groups, of discursive elements to bring about the formation of new discourses. Discourses are made up of chains of discursive elements or signifiers.<sup>6</sup> And it is these signifiers that we utilise when we link together formerly disparate discursive elements to create new discourses and new subjectivities (Davies 1991:50-1; Hekman 1991:59; Valverde 1991:183). Thus, the social network can be likened to 'a grammar, which conditions what can be uttered in a language but does not determine which actual utterances emerge (and when)' (Hoy, cited Barrett 1991:138-9; see also Hekman 1991:59).

Acts of resistance do not occur in a space beyond power (Foucault 1982:222-223; Kondo 1990:224). Rather, they are located within specific contexts, and certain power relations (Kondo 1990:29 & 43; Davies 1991:48-9). Consequently, the construction we have of our/selves may be overridden in the process of our everyday encounters with other people (Kondo 1990:26; Moore 1994:66-7). Kondo refers to this form of the exercise of power as the 'disciplinary production of "selves"' (Kondo 1990:26 & 43). How this operates to jeopardise an individual's preferred self-representation was made evident in a conversation I had with Anya over the resistance she has encountered to her attempt to break with the conventions of post-marital naming practices:

*Vivienne:* You told me the other day that people often assume, when they know that you are married, that you are Mrs Moore. How do you feel about that?

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<sup>6</sup> See p. 47 for a more detailed discussion of signifiers.

*Anya:* Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Even my family and some of our friends, some of Richard's friends they just automatically assume, they write letters and it is 'Mr and Mrs Richard Moore'.

I think it has a lot to do with the way they think. Because I have kept my name, perhaps they are not aware of it, or they don't understand, or realise that I think a certain way and that I have actually kept my name, or perhaps it is just not an issue for them. I think sometimes it is just easier to assume, you know that she has taken his name, I guess.

*Vivienne:* So how do you feel and react?

*Anya:* Oh sometimes I think, 'Oh, I wish they would realise' (laughs), but it gets to a point where, like I could write home to both of our parents ten million times and sign my name Anya Ferguson, and the next letter would still come back 'Mr and Mrs Richard Moore'. So with them it is not really worth pushing it. But with my own personal things, with my own bank accounts or anything like that, I am Ferguson, and that is how they relate to me.

By tracing these shifts in the discursive construction of the self it is possible to reflect on the power relations in existence within any context and to give consideration to the political implications of adopting one subject position rather than another. It is also suggestive of the need to consider resistance in all of its complexity.

*handwritten note:*  
 how do all these constructions  
 relate to each other?  
 how do they change?

## IV

The form of discourse analysis that I outlined in the previous chapter, and have used throughout this thesis, offers one way in which tracing multiple and shifting constructions of the self can be accomplished. By paying attention to the impact of context on these changing constructions of the self it is possible to explore who is exercising power over whom, and how. It also provides the basis from which to

consider the implications of accepting one version of the self rather than another for the ongoing constitution of social relations.

The product of the kind of textual analysis that I have undertaken are new understandings of the accounts people give of their relationships. These new understandings are suggestive of one of the basic premises of postmodernism: meaning, whether of a text or of experiences, can never be finally fixed but is continually open to redefinition: it is 'deferred' (Weedon 1987:25; Scott 1988a:35). This claim is built on a number of sophisticated theoretical arguments that I cannot do justice to here, although I would like to briefly define some of its key terms.

As I stated in the first section of this chapter, discourses are comprised of signs (Weedon 1987:23; Grosz 1989:xxi; Hollway 1989:50-1). A sign is made up of a signifier (image or word) and a signified (meaning) (Weedon 1987:23; Grosz 1989:xxi; Hollway 1989:50-1). The relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary (Weedon 1987:23; Grosz 1989:xxi; Hollway 1989:50-1). The signifier has no intrinsic meaning; rather this is derived from the signifier's discursive context and is, therefore, open to shifts in meaning (Weedon 1987:25; Hollway 1989:53). Thus, the definition of a signifier can only ever be temporary. The same signifier within another discourse may take on an altered meaning through its attachment to a different signified. For example, 'partner' is a word that can either mean someone you live with if its meaning is derived from a discourse on intimate relationships, or someone with whom you are involved in a money making enterprise, if its meaning is taken from business discourses.

This argument also means that the understandings that we generate from a text, just like those we produce of our experiences, should be seen as being constitutive. To elaborate: firstly, texts are usually comprised of discursive fragments (a small sequence of signifiers) and not discourses in their entirety; secondly, the same signifier may appear in a number of discourses, therefore, the readings we make of a text are dependent on the variety and range of discourses that we bring to the process of identifying the discursive location of a signifier

(Gavey 1989:466; Parker, I. 1990:193). Given that discourses are creative of material practices (Foucault 1972:49; Henriques et al. 1984:106; Scott 1988a:34-5), the discursive battle over the location of the signifier can be an important site for political struggle (Weedon 1987:24; see also Kondo 1990; Yeatman 1990).

In the process of engaging in discourse analysis I have drawn upon the technique of deconstruction. Deconstruction involves a focus on how meaning is produced within a discourse, paying particular attention to the use of oppositional thinking (or logocentrism).<sup>7</sup> Logocentric discourses are characterised by binary oppositions, or dichotomies, which typically take the form of 'A' and 'not-A': where the category 'not-A' is comprised of all objects (people or things) which lack 'A's' defining characteristic (Jay [1981] 1991:92-3). In other words, it is partly through the use of dichotomies that discourses establish social relations of power and powerlessness between the various subject positions (or objects) that a discourse constitutes.

Plainly, the value of the subject positions (objects) constituted within a discourse through the A/not-A binary are not equal (Grosz 1989:27). 'A' is considered to be the dominant term because it is the standard by which 'not-A' is evaluated, and subsequently designated as different or 'other' (Grosz 1989:27). Difference, within logocentric discourses, can only be apprehended in the form of A/not-A; hence, the heterogeneity of the objects contained within either category is denied (Scott 1988:46). An example that is pertinent to this research should serve as an illustration. Within many of the discourses that comprise the discursive field of long-term heterosexual relationships, marriage and cohabitation are constituted as opposites. Marriage, as the relational form that is both blessed by the church and

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<sup>7</sup> Structured by binary oppositions, logocentric discourses have dominated western thought (Grosz 1989:xv & 27). Cixous and Clément suggest that at the heart of all logocentric thought is a basic phallogentrism (Cixous & Clément 1986:63-65); that is the assumption of male subjectivity as the norm and woman as 'other' (Grosz 1989:105). The project of deconstruction is, therefore, the disruption of both logocentrism and phallogentrism.

legally sanctioned by the state, is the norm, the yardstick against which cohabitation is measured (and frequently found wanting): whereas marriage is constructed as a permanent relationship, cohabitation is unstable and temporary. If, however, we only discern marriage and cohabitation through this kind of oppositional lens we are unable to see the multiple ways in which marriage and cohabitation are differently experienced by different people. Marriage for some people is a relationship of short duration, while for others it may last most of their adult life. Cohabitation may entail separate monies, yet for others it involves the integration of their finances.

Deconstruction is the defiance of either/or thinking (Grosz 1989:xv & 29-30; Scott 1988:37-8; Poovey 1988:52 & 58-9). It seeks to disrupt the oppositional schema of a discourse by resituating the subject positions (objects) that make up the binary pair in different relations to each other, using other discourses to enable the process to occur. As a result, the 'natural' superiority of 'A' is challenged and its contours are shown to be 'leaky'. Deconstruction is, therefore, simultaneously an intervention into the way in which knowledge/reality and social power relations are constructed within that discourse.<sup>8</sup> In releasing subjects (us/them) from the constraining effect of a discourse, deconstruction contributes to the production of new possibilities (Butler 1992:15 & 17).

## V

The technique of deconstruction has not only been deployed to analyse people's talk, I have also drawn on it to put two of the key oppositions at play within this

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<sup>8</sup> Deconstruction is an intervention into a régime of truth. It ruptures the particular power/knowledge configuration of a discourse substituting it for another that is not rooted in either logocentrism or phallogentrism. In so doing it enables the production of new subjectivities located in new power relations (see Gavey 1989).

thesis under erasure. The discourse of cohabitation as marriage resistance argues for the superiority of cohabitation over marriage on the basis of the former's presumed greater equality. In chapter six, I use Olivia's shifting position in relation to these discourses to challenge this claim. Olivia's story suggests that cohabitational discourse can also be used to construct inequitable power relations. Noting this, the discursively constructed difference between cohabitation and marriage begins to collapse as it becomes clear that both relational forms require critical scrutiny.

During my analysis of Olivia's narrative I also deconstruct the opposition between resistance and compliance. It is possible to read Olivia's decision to marry her partner Steve as an act of compliance to parental pressure and social norms. However, with further consideration, it becomes evident that Olivia uses marriage to re-negotiate the terms of her relationship with Steve. Olivia draws on aspects of marital discourse to resist his exercise of power through an open-ended rendering of the cohabitational relationship.

Olivia's story highlights the need to acknowledge the part perspective plays in labelling an act: resistance and compliance prove to be slippery concepts. Attention to what Olivia has to say underlines the importance of noting the simultaneity of resistance and compliance: a consistent theme of this thesis. Resistant practices are often infused with concessionary moments, just as so-called compliant positions may be accepted in order to counter the exercise of power. To achieve this kind of understanding it is necessary to attend to the presence of complexity and contradiction within people's narratives. In so doing, it becomes impossible to produce categorical statements about people, to suggest that they are either like this, or like that, but never both. By way of contrast, my depictions of the people in this study tend to be multi-layered and somewhat riddled with exceptions.

## FINDING THE 'MAN' IN THE HETEROSEXUAL COUPLE

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For what is finally at stake is not so much how 'to make visible the invisible' as how to produce the conditions of visibility for a different social subject.

(de Lauretis 1984:8-9)

This chapter engages with two areas of debate within feminist research; namely, the proper scope of feminist research, and the status of the accounts generated during the course of feminist inquiries. The inclusion of men as participants in this study poses a challenge to the conceptualisation of feminist research in exclusive terms: feminist research has often been construed as research that is 'on' or 'about' women. My departure from this model is in accord with recent shifts within feminist research. During the 1990s feminist research has increasingly focused on how gender relations are constituted within particular settings, and how notions of gender are utilised to construct other forms of social power relations (see Scott 1988b; Moore 1994).



In the light of the current emphasis on gender, this thesis examines the strategic use of cohabitation to disrupt how gender relations are structured within dominant discourses on marriage. The success of this intervention cannot, however, be guaranteed. As I argued in the Chapters one and two, cohabitation is a contested domestic arrangement, therefore, the tactical implications of cohabitation are dependent, in part, on the meanings attributed to it within specific settings. One site of potential conflict, that is of crucial significance, is that of the cohabiting relationship. Given the likelihood that members of a couple may disagree over the meaning of cohabitation, it is important to have access to how men constitute the cohabiting relationship. Talking with men provides an opportunity to analyse how they discursively construct the cohabiting relationship, including the implications of this for how power is exercised.

Despite these advantages, the participation of men within this study raises a number of methodological issues. Methodology refers to theoretical discussions of the way research should be conducted, including the way in which our research practices are shaped by our ontologies or theories of the social world (Harding 1987:2-3; Stanley & Wise 1990:26). The methodological implications of the inclusion of men are canvassed in the first part of this chapter. Of particular note, is the effect interviewing men has on the interviewer/interviewee relationship. Later, as I continue to reflect on the practices of feminist research, I illustrate the benefits of having interviewed men through the analysis of their talk. In this manner, I provide examples of how I have used 'discourse analysis' to reflect on cohabitation as a political strategy.

## I

To address women's lives and experiences in their own terms, to create theory grounded in the actual experience and language of women is the central agenda for feminist social science.

(Du Bois 1983:108)

Feminist research can be construed as a corrective enterprise directed at rectifying the 'exclusion, distortion and neglect of women' within the dominant knowledges of western cultures (Acker, Barry & Esseveld [1983] 1991:134; see also Jones 1992:25). It is possible, therefore, to see it as a practice that resists the preservation of social research as a 'boy's own' game. Accordingly, feminist research is often defined as being fundamentally concerned with women's experiences: that is, it asks questions that stem from women's lives and draws on women's experiences to produce new accounts of social realities (Acker Barry & Esseveld [1983] 1991:135; Stanley & Wise 1983:196; Cook & Fonow 1986:5; Harding 1987:6-7). Controversially, Harding departs from other writers in this field to suggest that men can make useful contributions as researchers to the production of feminist knowledges (Harding 1987:11-2).

At the outset of this research project I was primarily interested in how women experienced the cohabitational relationship. I thought that I would ask heterosexual women to reflect on why they lived with their partners outside marriage.<sup>1</sup> And I would discuss with them how they used 'cohabitation', as possibly distinct from 'marriage', to negotiate the interpersonal, familial, domestic, and economic relationships they encountered as a consequence of living with their male partners. The research project, as conceptualised in its infancy, offered both the opportunity to record one way in which heterosexual women chose to live their lives, and the chance to re-evaluate the character of the living together relationship.

While I wanted to 'document' this aspect of their lives, it was not an aspiration that I could implement. My introduction to postmodern feminism through the work of Weedon (1987), Scott (1988a) and Gavey (1989), amongst others, had already sensitised me to the inadequacies of a simplistic notion of 'experience'. Within a postmodern feminist epistemology, accounts of experiences

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<sup>1</sup> 'Partners' is used here for the sake of convenience, and because it is the descriptive term most commonly used by cohabitees.

do not reflect a pre-existent reality, rather, such accounts actively and selectively, *construct* meaning (Weedon 1987:34; Scott 1988a:34-5; Gavey 1989:461). The corollary of this is that 'experience has no inherent meaning' (Weedon 1987:34). Rather, the meanings that we give to our experiences are dependent on the discursive resources that we bring to this task and are, therefore, potentially open to reinterpretation (Weedon 1987:85). To borrow Lather's phrasing: 'we do not so much *describe* as *inscribe* [experience] in discourse' (1991:90; see also Jones 1992:25). Consequently language, in the form of competing discourses, becomes an important political terrain; a site that affords a view of the way in which subjectivities, social relations and institutions are structured (Weedon 1987:24; Scott 1988a:34; see also Kondo 1990; Yeatman 1990).

If language as discourse is the vehicle through which experience is given meaning, then a foundational approach, which treats experience as the uncontrovertible proof of the analysis at hand, has to be abandoned (Scott 1992:24, 26 & 32-3). This does not mean, however, that women's experiences cease to be crucial to feminist inquiry. Indeed, 'experience' remains centre stage, but its place within feminist research has shifted. Reconfigured as a discursive event, the accounts women give of their experiences form the basis of our analytic practices. Emphasis is, therefore, placed on the political consequences of the particular constructions (or meanings) of their experiences that women 'choose' to make from within the range of possible constructions (or meanings). Accepting Scott (1988b:5, 1992:25-7) and Mohanty's ([1987] 1992:76-7 & 80-1) argument that discourses play a critical role in constituting the personal as (a)political we might ask: what identities do we accept as our own as a consequence of the construction of our experience through discourse; and what are their political effects?

Just as postmodern feminism has unsettled our understandings of 'experience', so too has the category 'women' been the subject of debate within contemporary feminist theorising. Writings by Maori feminists, women of colour and 'third world' feminists have all contributed to the recognition that the category

*my sample*

'women' was created in the image of white feminists (Awatere 1984; hooks 1984; Mohanty [1988] 1991; Irwin 1992). As a result, it is no longer possible to talk of 'women's experiences' as if women form a homogenous group (Spelman 1988:3). 'White' feminists, myself included, have come to acknowledge that specific kinds of women are produced through the convergence of race, class, sexuality and gender within the discourses that constitute us as experiencing subjects (de Lauretis 1986:14; Flax [1987] 1990:40; Riley 1988:1-2; Butler 1992:15-6). This is eloquently articulated by Elizabeth Spelman:

...though all women are women, no woman is only a woman. Those of us who have engaged in it must give up the hunt for the generic woman—the one who is all and only a woman, who by some miracle of abstraction has no particular identity in terms of race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, language, religion, nationality. (Anonymous, by the way, was not a generic woman).

Don't misunderstand me: I've never met a generic woman I didn't like. But I don't want my brother, or my sister, to marry one. And I certainly wouldn't want to be one: generic women don't eat rice and beans, collard greens, samosa, challah, hot dogs or Wonder Bread.... And while it is true that generic women don't have bad breath, that is hardly any consolation, I should think, for having no breath at all.

(1988:187)

## II

Attempts to articulate features of feminist research in the 1980s frequently prescribed that it should be change orientated (Acker, Barry & Esseveld [1983] 1991:134; Cook & Fonow 1986:12-3; Harding 1987:8; Thompson 1992:4). This emphasis on change has often been associated with a concomitant emphasis on action research (see Mies 1983).

Yet the notion that feminist researchers should intervene directly and deliberately in the lives of others fits less easily with the feminisms of the 1990s. Feminists, reflecting on the research practice of the 1980s, have, at times, reconstructed the research encounter as an uninvited intrusion, or a meeting between 'missionary' and possible convert, in which the consequences of the encounter are born disproportionately by the researched (Borland 1991:64; Stacey [1988] 1991:113; Opie 1992:66). Evaluations of this kind have prompted a re-examination of the possibilities of emancipatory research (see for example, Lather 1988) and a greater awareness that power exercised in the name of liberation is nonetheless power (Flax 1992:447; Jones 1992:25).

Despite this cautionary note, I believe feminist researchers should not detach themselves from the political goal of a move towards more equitable gender power relations. Nor should they neglect the challenges of doing research in ways which might contribute to positive changes in the lives of those who participate. Gavey's work offers an example of how feminist researchers might continue the project of change through our analytic practices (1989:466 & 472; 1990:177). Drawing on Foucault's discourse theory, Gavey proposes a form of discourse analysis that aims to displace dominant truths from their pedestals (1989:463). Foucauldian discourse analysis calls into question what was previously accepted as 'natural', 'fact', or simple 'common sense' (Weedon 1987:75-80). In so doing, discourse analysis opens up the possibility of reworking the meanings attached to experiences, and sets the stage for the contestation of the distribution of material resources, thereby contributing to alterations in the structure of gender relations. This feature of discourse analysis prompted Ian Parker to suggest that we view discourse analysis as a variety of action research (1990:201). Although I think Parker's claim is a little exaggerated, it nevertheless indicates that our analytic practices can play a critical role in preventing feminist research from merely

reproducing, on paper, a world structured by gender, class, and racial inequalities (Acker, Barry & Esseveld [1983] 1991:135 & 143; Cook & Fonow 1986:12; Borland 1991:64).

### III

But even a research project that relies on the discursive analysis of interview texts, as this one does, cannot completely escape the contradictory features of the project of feminist research. To remain consistent, feminist researchers cannot simultaneously engage in politically motivated research practices and, at the same time, produce inequitable relationships in the process of doing research (Acker, Barry & Esseveld [1983] 1991:136; Du Plessis 1993:6). Observing thus, a growing body of feminist literature is devoted to discussions of how power is exercised within the interviewer/interviewee relationship, together with a consideration of the steps that might be taken to maximise an egalitarian relationship. Many of these precepts were first articulated by Ann Oakley (1981). For instance, Oakley recommended that feminist researchers establish a research relationship that could be best characterised as a reciprocal exchange between friends (1981:45-9). Subsequently, these recommendations have been the subject of much debate as feminist researchers have become more sceptical about the possibility of ever being able to produce entirely equal research relationships (Stacey [1988] 1991; Ribbens 1989; Riessman 1991; Cotterill 1992; Reinhartz 1992). Of course, such scepticism does not mean that feminist researchers should abandon attempts to engage in ethical research, rather, it requires them/us to be continually reflexive.

The presumption, in most of the articles mentioned above, is that feminist research encounters take place between women (Stacey [1988] 1991:116). In other words, it is possible to conceptualise — as I did — the task of feminist research in

terms of the equivalent of three R's of feminist research: feminist research is research *on*, *by*, and *for* women (Stacey [1988] 1991:111; Armstrong 1993:10). Men appear tangentially in this picture, or are explicitly excluded for feminist reasons (Kremer 1990:466-7).

Against this dominant conception of the purpose and scope of feminist research, Smart asserts the need for 'feminists to do research which, while it may concern women, is not necessarily *on* women' (1984:157, emphasis in the original; see also Armstrong 1993:10). Smart's comments, arising from her research into the judicial treatment of marriage, and those of others researching marital power who found that interviewing both partners is preferable because of the likelihood that there will be 'discrepancies in their reports' (Blumberg & Coleman 1989:226), raised the thorny issue of the place of men in my research. Why thorny? The answer to this question is set out in the following paragraphs.

Ribbens (1989) and Cotterill (1992) commenting generally on the interviewer/interviewee relationship within feminist research have suggested that the nature of the research contract is such that the interviewer is positioned as the 'sympathetic listener' (Ribbens 1989:584; Cotterill 1992:596; see also Reinharz 1992:20). While this might contribute to constituting the interviewer as powerful, in that they may become the recipients of a 'confession',<sup>2</sup> it nevertheless delimits the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. These boundaries, according to Smart (1984:155), are drawn more tightly when it is a woman interviewing a man because discourses of femininity act to reinforce the role of the interviewer as the 'sympathetic listener'.

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<sup>2</sup> Foucault suggests that the obligation to confess, to tell our own personal stories, is a crucial mechanism in modern societies for the exercise of power via the production of 'truth' (Foucault [1978] 1990:58-9). At a minimum a confession necessitates the presence of two people: the one who is required to speak and the other who listens and passes judgement. Hence, the confession 'unfolds within a power relationship' (Foucault [1978] 1990:61).

In other words, the assumption, within the interview, that the interviewer and interviewee share certain beliefs which permit the interview to take place, in combination with the gendered nature of these encounters, can render the female interviewer virtually defenceless (McKee & O'Brien 1983:158; Smart 1984:155; Williams & Heikes 1993:282 & 287). As Smart (1984:155-7; see also McKee & O'Brien 1983:158) found out, this dynamic may make it difficult for a woman interviewer to interrupt or challenge sexist or racist behaviour exhibited by men she is interviewing. Experiencing herself as vulnerable, Smart concluded that not all research encounters inevitably position the researcher as powerful and that her interviews with men produced many frustrating and awkward moments (Smart 1984:155-7; see also McKee & O'Brien 1983:158).

My own encounters with men also proved to be awkward. To be fair, this may not have been entirely due to the gendered dimension of these interviews. My inexperience as an interviewer undoubtedly contributed to some of the tension. I was also, at this stage of the research, quite resistant to the inclusion of men within a feminist research project. The impetus to interview men came from my supervisor, who exerted some pressure on me to at least attempt to record their talk on tape. My resistance to talking with men about their relationships was partially fuelled by a concern that I did nothing within the interview to betray the confidences of their partners. In practice, this meant that I opted for a non-aligned stance that allowed me to 'probe' for further information. At times this felt distinctly uncomfortable, as if I had, like Smart (1984:155-6), compromised my feminist politics. The topic of the interviews did nothing to alleviate the unease. In asking men to reflect on their intimate relationships with women I had inadvertently strayed into forbidden territory: this was not the subject matter of legitimate conversations between a woman and a man who were not already close friends or connected through the counsellor/client relationship (McKee & O'Brien 1983:151). Moreover, as a woman engaged in 'sympathetic listening' I could



potentially be positioned as the recipient of negative accounts of their female partners. It was not a possibility that thrilled me.

The body language displayed by this group of men was also entirely different from that exhibited by the women I interviewed. It was not uncommon for the men to twist their bodies away from me so that they sat side on as we talked. Alternatively, they sat, bodies sprawled out, with their legs extending over nearby chairs. Some yawned, broke the interview in half for another appointment, or otherwise hinted that the interview should not take up too much time. I found all this disconcerting and could not really say that I experienced myself as a powerful agent in these situations (McKee & O'Brien 1983:158; Smart 1984:157; see also Cotterill 1992:601-5).

These features of the interviews should not be taken as an indication that the men in this study talked less freely or for shorter periods of time. Sometimes they volunteered information about their relationships that I had not solicited. For example, Steve and I were talking about conflict in his relationship with Olivia when he suddenly began to speak about their sexual relationship:

*Steve:* ...And just the lack of communication on certain things comes up. And the problems like, Olivia often compares our relationship to what it was when we, before we had the house whereby we were both at sort of - ... And like the first year of any relationship it is full on sex at any time of the day. We would probably make love three or four times of the day. And have lunch in her bedroom, bonk and have wine and all that.

Which is all very nice. It is great. But when you come down and when you get- ... It is more, let's make love, bang, bang, bang. Thank you very much. That is it sort of thing. That is what it gets like.

At this juncture in the interview, knowing that Olivia had only briefly touched on this topic in her more lengthy interviews, I could have quite happily conveyed to Steve that sexual relations were not a part of this research project and that I was

unsure why he wanted to tell me about this aspect of his relationship. However, I felt constrained by the prospect that such a statement would threaten the flow of the interview: I may have inhibited Steve's comments about other areas of his life with Olivia that we had not yet explored. Moreover, I wanted those who were interviewed to feel free to guide the conversation into areas that they considered important. Caught in this contradiction I listened, and even returned later to this topic to ask Steve to elaborate.

Despite misgivings and moments of awkwardness, the talk garnered from men has provided a rich opportunity to gain an insight into the variety of discourses that are deployed by them as they construct their relationships. More importantly, the discourses that are used by the men I interviewed constituted an essential part of the environment of the women with whom they cohabit (Armstrong 1993:10). Men, like women, are active participants in the construction and reproduction of gender relations. Given the necessity to contextualise women's accounts of cohabitation, it was vital to attend to what the men they live with had to say about cohabitation and marriage. In this research endeavour, the purpose of interviewing men was not to check on the veracity, or otherwise, of women's accounts (contra Blumberg & Coleman 1989), but to afford direct access to another piece of the picture.

## IV

The relevance of an examination of what men have to say is illustrated by analysis of the discourses they use to construct their relationships with female partners. My concern, in this section, is with their discursive construction of the sexual terrain of cohabiting relationships. Throughout, I pay attention to the multiple discourses within which these men are located and which they use to evaluate their own actions and the actions of others. By subjecting this material to this kind of critical scrutiny the tactical features of discourse analysis are made apparent.

The material presented in this, and subsequent sections, was volunteered by Andrew and Duncan without any prompting on my behalf. As a consequence, it should not be seen as exhaustive of the kinds of things the men in this study might have said about (hetero)sexual relations had they taken part in more sustained discussions of this terrain.

In the extract which appears below Andrew produces a gender differentiated reading of the meaning of heterosexual sex:

*Andrew:* ... I think women, I think women's sort of basic sexuality is quite different from men's.

*Vivienne:* In what way?

*Andrew:* Oh, men are a lot more into just having sex and women generally, ah sort of, expect there to be a bit more than just sex. You know they are more into love and emotional things. Whereas men can just get into sex for sex. I mean some women can too. Yeah.

Drawing on what Hollway calls the 'permissive' discourse (1984:234-5, 1989:56; see also Wight 1996:157) Andrew initially constructs male sexuality (and presumably his own) in terms of the pursuit of sexual pleasures for their own sake. In contrast, Andrew derives the significance of sexual experiences for women from the 'have/hold' discourse (Hollway 1984:232-3, 1989:55). Read through this discourse, Andrew believes that sex for women is largely connected to notions of sexual partnership and love (Wight 1996:159). This rendition of the meaning of sex for women is complicated by his acknowledgment that women can also take up subject positions within the 'permissive' discourse.

Andrew's construction of his sexual relationship with Rachel is, however, contradictory. This became apparent as Andrew continued to speak about this aspect of his relationship :

*Andrew:* ...No I wouldn't want to do anything, I wouldn't want to upset Rachel. But I mean she is quite attracted to this guy that she used to work with

... but he was married. And I sort of wonder if she would have done anything if he wasn't married.

But I mean I used to feel quite possessive about Rachel in that way. I don't as much now. I don't know what I would do if she slept with someone else. I like to think I wouldn't do any- oh I mean it would probably depend on who it was.

*Vivienne:* It might depend on what significance it had for Rachel?

*Andrew:* Yeah that is right. If it meant she wasn't going to love me any more that would be worse than if she just wanted to fuck someone. But then I sort of think that if you are going to fuck someone you need to be, well this is just for me anyway, I sort of feel that I would need to ... feel something for the other person. I could never do it with anyone that I didn't really like, you would have to like them.

The outcome of his own positioning within the 'have/hold' discourse is that he contradicts earlier statements that disconnect male sexuality from the emotional realm. Speaking from within the 'have/hold' discourse, Andrew cannot envisage engaging in heterosexual sex when feelings are absent. As a subject of the 'have/hold' discourse, Andrew endorses the principle of monogamy. Monogamy gains its imperative for two reasons. Firstly, having constituted his relationship with Rachel through the 'have/hold' discourse, a violation of the rule of monogamy throws this relationship into jeopardy. Andrew is therefore willing to restrict expressions of his sexuality in order to maintain his relationship with Rachel. Secondly, the promotion of the standard of monogamy increases his feeling of security within the relationship. Because Andrew tends to read Rachel's sexual attractions through the 'have/hold' discourse, her attractions to other men are taken as evidence of her desire to form an emotional attachment that will supersede the one she has with Andrew. Understood in this light, Rachel's interest in other men seems threatening; it is not simply about sex.

Within the 'have/hold' discourse sexual episodes serve to differentiate 'friendships' from 'relationships'.<sup>3</sup> The presence, or absence, of sexual connections is, therefore, highly pertinent to the determination of the status of a relationship: it confers levels of intimacy. Yet sex is not the only symbol of intimacy. In the following excerpt, Andrew offers the exchange of 'secrets' as an alternative marker of closeness:

*Vivienne:* Do you think sleeping with somebody else is a kind of betrayal?

*Andrew:* If I ever slept with anyone else the first person I would tell would be Rachel.

*Vivienne:* Yeah?

*Andrew:* Yeah because I couldn't- You know, if she ever slept with anyone else I would want her to tell me. I would feel worse if she didn't tell me because then I would feel like she was trying to hide something.

Andrew suggests that when an extra-relational sexual episode is concealed its meaning should be derived from the 'have/hold' discourse. In contrast, its revelation permits a reading of the significance of sex through the permissive discourse. This latter discursive construction of sexual encounters strips sex of emotional repercussions. Hence, it provides support for the substitution of the swapping of verbal intimacies as the barometer of closeness.

## V

The style of discourse analysis utilised within this thesis incorporates the technique of deconstruction. As I outlined in Chapter two, deconstruction highlights the

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathon suggests that becoming sexual with another person is an important milestone in the narrative of a relationship. (See Chapter one pp. 20-1).

effects of using oppositional thinking to construct meaning.<sup>4</sup> The value of deconstruction is perhaps best demonstrated in practice. In order to do this I want to introduce an extract from my interview with Duncan. On Duncan's initiative our conversation had shifted to his sexual relationship with his partner Chris:

*Vivienne:* Were you reluctant for Chris to go out by herself?

*Duncan:* Depending on what it was. We had a, this is getting into the personal stuff now, we had a long problem with sexual compatibility. Um to do with you know amount of time and lateral thinking about it. I'm a bit more into it at any time and as wide a range of options as you can think about. And Chris is fairly straight and fairly inhibited. You know, about once a month. And we had a lot of problems there.  
(three sentences later...)

Chris has gradually worked on it. I tried helping for a long time, but I couldn't. I guess you can't teach your partner to drive either. It got to be a real bug bear, to the point that I thought we needed outside help. And she's eventually just come to the party by making an effort really. And equally I don't push, I don't thump, I don't get drunk or get aggressive about it. I get sad and cuddly, rather than angry.

So yeah I had a problem that way. But I had the problem, well I guess we did between us. I had a jealousy problem, but um I think she had a sexual one.

In the discourse that Duncan uses to construct his understandings of his sexual experiences with Chris, an opposition is produced between the 'sexually adventurous' individual (Duncan) and the 'sexually inhibited' individual (Chris). Implicit within this opposition is the assumption that the 'sexually adventurous' individual is in fact the 'sexually normal' individual. A hierarchy is thereby established: colonising the position of the norm allows Duncan to define Chris's sexual practices as deficient and consequently in need of change. To put it another

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<sup>4</sup> Chapter two contains a full discussion of deconstruction, pp. 48-50.

way, this discourse allows Duncan to exert power within the relationship because it constitutes him as sexually normal and Chris as sexually abnormal. However, towards the end of this extract, Duncan reassigns the blame for their sexual difficulties. At this point, drawing on a discourse that suggests that he ought to 'own' his difficulties rather than imposing them on others, Duncan accepts responsibility for some of the problems they face in this arena of their lives. While Chris has a 'sexual problem', Duncan concedes that he has a 'jealousy problem'.

As Gavey (1990:154-5) points out, the discourse of (hetero)sexual normality, accompanied by the imperative for coital sex, has been especially effective in regulating the frequency and mode of (hetero)sexual interactions. It positions women as sexually reactive: our/their choices are limited to saying 'yes' or 'no' to coital sex (Gavey 1990:176). The discourse of (hetero)sexual normality also restricts the range of practices that might be recognised as sexual, and hence it imposes a limit on the variety of ways in which (hetero)sexual desire might be expressed.

Because of its role in policing women's heterosexual practices, the discourse of (hetero)sexual normality forms a central part of what Gavey calls the 'technologies of heterosexual subjugation' (Gavey 1990:146-7). The power of the discourse of (hetero)sexual normality rests, in part, with women's exposure to this discourse, and their application of it to themselves and their behaviours in heterosexual encounters. This internalisation of heterosexual norms permits men to wield power in their sexual relationships with women without resorting to force or violence (Gavey 1990:161). Positioning himself as a sexually 'normal' individual, Duncan states that he has never thumped Chris, or otherwise been aggressive with her, in his attempt to satisfy his sexual desires. Instead of resorting to these tactics, Duncan adopts a 'sad and cuddly' stance in their interactions over sex. In so doing, Duncan is able to claim that he is both the 'sexually normal' individual and the patient, reasonable and loving partner. He is able to disavow his exercise of power that the process of deconstruction makes visible.

## VI

Before I draw this chapter to a close, I want to present one final example of the practice of discourse analysis that should confirm its tactical character. The theme continues to be that of Duncan and Chris's sexual relationship:

*Vivienne:* You mentioned that you had moral values before, what kind of moral values are those?

*Duncan:* Oh, things like faithfulness to partners. Um I've been close to physical unfaithfulness with Chris once and it was so traumatic for me, um in the head. Oh, I was basically seduced by an old time girlfriend. And, well it was my lack of dealing with Chris at the time. It was um very tempting, I got very close, but finally didn't.

Ah, I guess I look at it as if you are out screwing on the side, or having an affair, your main relationship has got major problems anyway. And that was actually the turning point for us with our sexual relationship. I said, 'Look I think I'm out there doing that you know', or 'I got that far because of us not being what we should be'.

Several remarks that Duncan makes seem to be in need of critical attention. To begin with, Duncan displaces responsibility for his 'near' sexual indiscretion onto, first his ex-girlfriend, and secondly Chris, his current partner. This displacement permits Duncan to deny his own complicity in the event and thereby to retain an image of himself as both a moral man (in terms of the 'have/hold' discourse) and an innocent victim: a man whose sexuality has had to withstand the double onslaught of the 'seductive woman' whose sexual practices are unchecked and the 'madonna/virgin' whose sexual desires are repressed. This familiar construction of women's sexuality presents women with an insoluble dilemma: no space is provided within this scheme for women to experience themselves as sexually active beings without automatically becoming sexually rapacious (Hollway 1984:232).



Further, Duncan articulates a widely held belief, a common-sense 'truth' if you like, that an affair is indicative of a primary relationship in trouble. However, in this instance, an affair may signal that Duncan's dual location within the 'have/hold' and 'male sexual needs' discourses can produce conflict and that Duncan has resolved this conflict by attaching greater importance to his sexual needs. To put this in another way, in the moment that Duncan contemplated having an affair the discursive battle over the constitution of Duncan's subjectivity was temporarily won by the 'male sexual needs' discourse. In the end, by putting aside the potential affair, Duncan privileges monogamy over sexual expression. But his adherence to the standard of monogamy is conditional on increased opportunities for sexual expression within his relationship with Chris. Presumably the conflict could also have been resolved through the acceptance by Duncan of a subject position within another discourse, for instance on male sexual constraint, but the fact that such a discourse is not even mentioned suggests the relative lack of power this discourse has in the construction of his sexuality.

## VII

I do not propose, as I conclude this chapter to offer an absolute or definitive answer to the question: what is there to be learnt from talking with men? When interviews with men are subjected to the kind of discourse analysis practiced above there are obvious gains: we come to know with much greater clarity how men construct their worlds and how these constructions perpetuate, or contest, dominant configurations of gender relations. Specifically, the discursive analysis of interviews with men affords insights into the some of discursive practices that need critical attention if women are to achieve equality in their intimate relationships with men. For instance, many of the examples of textual analysis contained within

this chapter point to the ongoing salience within feminist discourses of critiques heterosexuality. In other words, positioning oneself outside of marriage may not be sufficient protection against dominant conceptions of gender as they infuse not only sexual practices, but also how long-term heterosexual relationships are 'experienced'.

Despite the demonstrable benefits that can accrue as a consequence of interviewing men, I remain ambivalent about the place of men as research participants in feminist research. Given the political agenda of feminist research, the relationship between the feminist researcher and male participant may be one of antagonism. In other words, rather than interviewing an 'insider', someone with whom the researcher has shared 'experiences', the interview becomes an exchange between an 'insider' and an 'outsider'. In this research project, my status as both an 'insider' and 'outsider' with respect to the men I interviewed has produced a number of tensions.<sup>5</sup> I also feel uncomfortable with my general lack of sympathy for the men I interviewed. This situation is made more difficult by the fact that I encounter some of these men in my social network. Of course, I could also lack sympathy with some of the women who participated, but this didn't occur in this research project (cf. Condor, cited Reinharz 1992:26).

Furthermore, as I reread the comments that I have made on the basis of my analysis of some of the interview material I gathered during my talks with the men in this study I can imagine their indignation and sense of betrayal: these men trusted me and look what I have done with their words! However, conflict between the researcher and the researched over the meanings of the text of an interview are not confined to mixed-sex encounters (see for example, Borland 1991). As feminist researchers, we cannot presume that the women we interview, even when they identify as feminists, will necessarily share the understandings we

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<sup>5</sup> At the time that I undertook the interviews I was known to some of the participants socially and was also cohabiting; hence, my 'insider' status. I was also subjecting cohabitation and marriage to critical attention; I was an 'outsider'.

generate through our research (Acker, Barry & Esseveld [1983] 1991:142; Ribbens 1989:590; Cotterill 1992:604).

Although seldom practiced, some feminist researchers have suggested that the meaning of an interview text should be derived collaboratively with the interviewee (Acker, Barry & Esseveld [1983] 1991:141-2; Borland 1991:71-3). In this manner, the power of the researcher, at the point of writing, vis à vis the researched is minimised (Acker, Barry & Esseveld [1983] 1991:141-2; Borland 1991:71-3). I have drawn on an alternative strategy; the presentation of open readings of interview material. While I believe these readings should be given credence, they are not the only readings that could be made of these texts. In principle, the number of possible readings is endless. The strategy of producing open readings is supportive of the balancing act that feminist researchers seek to perform: it allows me/us to speak with an analytical voice without assuming 'authority' over these texts.

During the process of interviewing I often thought that my ideal solution to the 'man' question would be to have a man interview the men. In part, this solution is derived from quite a strong current within feminist social science that suggests like should study like (Ribbens 1989:589; Allen & Baber 1992:12; see also Harding 1987:8 & 11). A man interviewing men would seem to fit with this dictum. At the same time, this strategy could potentially produce an interview encounter that was more equally balanced in terms of power. In addition, the lack of face-to-face contact could prevent the development of a sense of divided loyalties that I experienced when interviewing both members of a couple.<sup>6</sup> Yet the argument that women should interview women and men should interview men is based on an assumption that gender overrides other axes of difference, for example class and race (or even location within discourses on gender and sexuality). It also presumes that such interview contexts will be more revealing. Neither of these claims seem

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<sup>6</sup> Discomfort might also be experienced by a male interviewer who was critical of dominant discourses on heterosexuality.

to be sustainable (see Reissman 1991; Williams & Heikes 1993). Moreover, it is likely that a team approach to interviewing would produce as many problems as it solves. If it is acknowledged that the accounts that are produced as a result of interviews are shaped by the social characteristics of both participants, and therefore partial, then to insist on same-sex interviews is merely to produce a different, and not necessarily better, partial account (Williams & Heikes 1993:290). Likewise, the addition of another researcher simply multiplies the possibilities for interpretive conflicts from a clash between researcher and researched to a confrontation between researcher and researcher.

In sum then, the project of feminist research is fraught with tensions to which there are no easy solutions. Feminist researchers are confronted with a range of research options each with their advantages and disadvantages. As Smart wisely states: 'ultimately I suspect that the idea that there is an ideal type of feminist research is spurious...' (1984:158). What is important, therefore, is ongoing dialogue which enables careful scrutiny of research practices to take place, rather than carefully policed prescriptions about what is allowed in the name of feminist research.

*Why choose just, as you say, the  
standards which are  
sometimes suggested?*

## MANAGING SELVES I: THE PUBLIC 'EYE/I'<sup>1</sup>

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Naming can be an affirmative act of self-definition; labelling and categorization are acts of those in power directed at those with less power.

(Mary Crawford 1992:429)

The question of how we are named, whether we name ourselves or are named by others speaks to the triple concerns of this chapter: the ongoing elaboration of a concept of resistance (or agency) that I believe is compatible with feminist politics; the analysis of the discourses of those who choose not to marry; and an exploration of the identities that are made available through the practice of heterosexual cohabitation. These are connected concerns. My interest in cohabitation lies with its use by some people in their attempt to find new ways of living long-term heterosexual relationships that do not replicate the inequalities ascribed to 'traditional marriage'. My project, therefore, focuses on one strategy that has been used to try to transform long-term heterosexual relations. Hence, it raises the issue of how resistance to the exercise of power might be best conceptualised.

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Kondo (1990) for this notation.

The proposition that living together might in any way be different from marriage goes against the grain of the general tendency within feminist writings to include these relationships within the same critical embrace as if there is no difference between cohabitation and marriage, or that any such differences are so minimal as to warrant no further comment (see for example, Delphy & Leonard 1992:14). Yet this stance places heterosexual women who want an egalitarian relationship with an intimate partner in a no-win situation: to marry is to risk voluntary collusion in one's oppression, whereas to refuse marriage is to delude oneself because cohabitation and marriage are simply different names for the same thing. The elision of cohabitation and marriage suggests that the possibilities for changing heterosexual coupledness are very limited. It is an approach that inhibits the development of critical questions about the contexts in which more equitable intimate heterosexual relations might be achieved.

Consistent with this focus on change within the arena of long-term heterosexual coupledness, this chapter does not contain a generalised description of the distinctive features of those heterosexual couples who live together (even if this could be done). Rather, I want to enter into a critical discussion of how some women have crafted a position for themselves within a counter-discourse on cohabitation. In this sense, this chapter can be read as part of a study of the micro-politics of one facet of everyday life (Fraser 1989:18; Ramazanoglu & Holland 1993:243; Nippert-Eng 1995:xiv; see also Kondo 1990; Weston 1991).

## I

Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are.

(Foucault 1982:216)

The crafting of an oppositional discourse offering different, hopefully more powerful, subject positions involves, as an initial step, the development of a critical perspective on dominant discourses like marriage. While an emerging critical or anti-discourse is often marginal, and may lack the kind of systematic articulation that is a feature of a dominant discourse, it nevertheless plays a key role in facilitating the rejection of compliant subject positions (Foucault 1980:80; Weedon 1987:110-1). In other words, anti-discourses are frequently the prerequisites for any attempt to move beyond isolated, idiosyncratic resistance to more sustained oppositional practices which have as their basis counter-discourses.<sup>2</sup> At this juncture, resistance ceases to be merely an oppositional activity contained by dominant prescriptions and begins to be transformational.<sup>3</sup>

In giving consideration to the comments made by the women who participated in this research, it became clear that their ability to produce an anti-discourse on marriage can be attributed to the existence of feminist discourses which construct women as autonomous individuals. As autonomous individuals their identities should not be defined in reference to the presence or absence of intimate relationships with men. In turn, this form of feminism draws on liberal-humanist discourses which do not constitute the masculine subject in terms of his relationships to women, but produces 'him' as an autonomous free agent. For women whose subjectivities are constituted within feminist discourses, the acceptance of a subject position within marital discourses may be sufficiently problematic to prompt refusal. Resistance, in this instance, is the outcome of exposure to discourses that contradict each other (namely, the discourse of liberal feminism that seeks to offer women the position of autonomous individual and

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<sup>2</sup> The distinction between an anti-discourse and a counter-discourse, as I am using these terms, is as follows: an anti-discourse is a discourse of critique, whereas a counter-discourse constructs 'new' and 'distinctive' subject positions and practices.

<sup>3</sup> See Hartsock (1990:167) and Soper (1993:33-4) who both discuss the dilemmas they believe Foucault's concept of resistance presents for feminists concerned with change and transformation.

marital discourse which construct women in terms of their relationships to their husbands) and the consequent development of reconstituted subject positions out of discursive elements derived, in part, from both feminist and marital discourses.

The pivotal target of the critique of marriage offered by the women with whom I spoke was the subject position of 'wife' (see Spender 1994:7; VanEvery 1995a:262). In the anti-discourse expounded by them, their rejection of this position is intermingled with critical statements about post-marital naming practices and forms of address. Hence, this anti-discourse is centrally concerned with the issue of how identities are constructed within marital discourse and especially with how the identity of women within marriage is defined in relation to that of a male subject. These women suggest that the question of how identity is constituted within marital discourse cannot be answered without recourse to notions of gender. After all, the loss of the female 'I' from view within the all encompassing embrace of the male has been historically marked by the replacement of a women's birth name after marriage with his surname (see Mann 1994:46 & 48). In this way, marriage operates as one of the institutional sites for the production and reproduction of inequitable gender relations.

Of course, the views expressed in the anti-discourse of these cohabitees are not original, although a belief in such ideas has not necessarily meant a total rejection of marriage. Lucy Stone claimed her birth name as the symbol of her identity when she refused to change her name on marriage in 1855 (Millar & Swift [1976] 1991:15).<sup>4</sup> The eruption in the 1970s of 'second wave' feminism brought a renewed challenge to the use of patronyms and so-called 'courtesy titles' (Millar & Swift [1976] 1991:17). According to 'second wave' feminist discourses, the application of either 'Mrs' or 'Miss' to adult women serves to differentiate them on the basis of a intimate relationship to a man and thus acts as a statement of sexual

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<sup>4</sup> In Aotearoa/New Zealand the practice of patronymy is not enforced by law, but is nevertheless institutionalised through social custom (Power 1994:26).



availability; hence, the popularity of Ms (Millar & Swift [1976] 1991:108-10; see also Society for Abolition of 'Miss' [1973] 1993:184-5).

The threat posed by marriage to a heterosexual woman's sense of herself as an individual underpins many of the comments made by the women who participated in this study. As one woman succinctly stated when asked why she would not like to become a wife:

*Rachel:* Property. You are becoming property.

Rachel's sentiments were expanded upon by another woman who noted:

*Barbara:* ...But I don't, I really dislike being referred to as 'my wife'. I feel it has got a stamp of possession that I don't like. And it makes you less of a person in some ways. You are less yourself and more an appendage to somebody else's identity.

According to these 'marriage resisters', to be possessed or owned by another is to become a thing, an object to be used or discarded at the whim of one's owner. As an object, without desire or will, one's full status as a subject is denied, one becomes less of a person. The identity of a wife, as constituted within this rendition of marital discourse, is only half an identity: you are the 'other half', dependent for completion on the presence of your husband (see Mann 1994:46 & 48).

While it is undoubtedly true that men also experience the marital bond as a statement of ownership, and that the use of the possessive 'my' frequently precedes the word 'husband' (as in 'This is my husband John...'), a husband's identity within western discourses on marriage has not been routinely subsumed underneath his wife's. I am familiar with the phrase 'Mrs John Smith', and its more

contemporary form 'Mrs Jane Smith', but have, with one exception, only ever heard of its reverse in jest.<sup>5</sup>

The ongoing significance of the still common practice of taking a husband's surname after marriage in the construction of gendered identities through marriage is illustrated by the following comment:

*Vivienne:* [If you were ever to get married] would you change your surname?

*Stephanie:* No. No, I don't think I would. For me that sort of harks back to the possession era when men sort of married and took on the wife's property. And everything sort of took the man's name and he took over ownership. That is what it reminds me of and I can't seem to shake that idea from my head.

Although a husband's literal ownership of his wife and all her belongings may be a thing of the past, taking another man's surname on marriage not only acts as a reminder of the inequalities of the old marital contract, it also suggests that, of the two identities that comprise the marital pair, the male identity continues to have greater cultural and social significance (see Mansfield & Collard 1988:162; Mann 1994: 48-9).

Within the anti-discourse on marriage elaborated by this group of cohabitees, the issue of the production of identities through marital discourse that both symbolise and sustain inequitable gender relations is not confined to the question of the usage of a patronym. As one woman summed it up:

*Michele:* ...But when you are married I feel like the female loses something because she becomes a 'Mrs Somebody'.

And I know you don't have to take on the person's name and I know you don't have to take on the word 'Mrs', but it is this concept that people have that you are a 'Mrs Somebody' or other.

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<sup>5</sup> In her article 'Your Name or Mine?' Power describes the one exception that I have come across: the case of a Taranaki man who, with some difficulty, adopted his wife's surname (1994:26).

And particularly when you become a mother its — I have heard some people say that they just feel like they have no identity at all. They are somebody's wife or somebody's mother.

One of the repercussions of marriage for women, according to the analysis Michele presents, is the replacement of their former identities with that 'Mrs Somebody'. Becoming a 'Mrs Somebody' leads to a diminished self because it means that her identity is subsumed within another's — 'she' is reduced to being a mere tangent of 'him'. Marriage resisters, like Michele, argue that the 'Mrs Somebody' problem is not overcome by either the refusal of the title 'Mrs' or the increasingly accepted, but marginal, practice of retaining birth names after marriage, because the use of these symbolic markers of a wife's subordinate status continues to be widespread. In other words, this viewpoint suggests that married women are defined relationally in a way in which married men are not. Yet this ongoing construction of married women in relational terms is at odds with the discursive construction of the self found within liberal feminism and utilised by these women to form their critique of marriage. Given their perception of the insurmountable nature of these difficulties the method of resistance preferred by most of the women I interviewed was the rejection of the position of wife altogether.

## II

Another aspect of the anti-discourse of marriage resistance, articulated by some of the women I interviewed for this research, is its critical slant on marriage as a public statement of one's membership in a heterosexual couple. As Michele put it, marriage is a 'piece of paper that sort of legally classifies you as a couple'. Thus, their critique of marriage is not confined to the manner in which conventional marital discourse constitutes the subordinate identity of a 'wife', but also

incorporates a challenge to the legal sanction provided by the state for the heterosexual coupled identity, and of the construction of a coupled identity itself:

*Rachel:* Well when you get married you sort of lose your individuality. Not just in law but in people's perceptions as well. You become the unit, a single unit as a couple and they won't let you be an individual. And I think you should still be allowed to be an individual even if you are living with a person in a relationship.

In this extract, Rachel deploys a liberal discourse of individualism in her anti-discourse on marriage to construct marriage as a threat to her individuality. According to Rachel, and the other women who made similar statements, the consequence of marriage is an imposition of a single identity of the couple where before the identities of two separate individuals were represented. These sentiments consolidate the negative assessment this group of marriage resisters make of the position of 'wife' by pointing to another layer of difficulty: the replacement of the 'I' of a separate and autonomous self with the 'we' of the couple.

Even when women cohabit rather than marry the issue of the maintenance of an independent and autonomous self remains pertinent. Sawicki suggests that this is one of the problems that besets the dominant conceptions of femininity:

As women, many of us have been taught to efface ourselves as a matter of course. Someone has suggested that Anonymous was a woman. The absence of a sense of self, of one's value and authority and of the legitimacy of one's needs and feelings is a hallmark of femininity as it has been defined in many patriarchal contexts.

(Sawicki 1991:106)

For some of the women with whom I spoke their negative appraisal of marriage was supplemented by a critique of couples per se. In Barbara's case this

is encapsulated in her rejection of what she dubs the 'Noah's ark principle' or going 'two by two'. Locating themselves at the intersection of these two discourses prompted these women, in the context of their interview with me, to de-emphasise their coupled status:

*Lisa:* ...I dislike being seen as part of a couple first and then an individual second. I prefer to be seen as an individual first and then secondly, that I am in a relationship.

Because the cohabitational situation lacks the social markers that typically accompany marriage, for instance the gold wedding ring, those who cohabit are often able to present themselves as people alone in situations; this may not be as readily achievable for married women.<sup>6</sup> Cohabitation is, therefore, utilised paradoxically by some cohabitees as a strategy of resistance to the symbolic markers of coupledness at the same time as they actually live a coupled relationship. For this reason, marriage resisting cohabitees might be viewed, rather cynically, as encouraging a public reading of themselves as radical while they nevertheless act conservatively.

Alternatively, living together as marriage resistance may be understood as an attempt by heterosexual women to balance contradictory and conflicting desires, the desire for independence and the desire for a heterosexual relationship, which prompts them to assert their coupled identities and individual identities in different situations:

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, it needs to be acknowledged that without a recognisable wedding ring, or the use of 'Mrs' as a form of address, married women are not always immediately identified as such, and can therefore also foreground an independent self in some contexts (see VanEvery 1995a:262-3, 1995b:21-2).

*Vivienne:* So independence is important for you?

*Nina:* Yes. Like I would just like to arrive at a place, well at a state in my life where I can be totally sort of independent without being so isolated and cold or anything like that, don't get me wrong.

Here Nina points to the existence of a struggle between the demands of coupledness and her desire for independence, in which the desire for independence has to be negotiated within the limits of what is acceptable for women in heterosexual relationships. The risks of being 'too independent' are isolation (rejection) and being constructed as emotionally deficient (cold); hence, unfeminine and unattractive to men.

The refusal of a subject position within marital discourse symbolises the intention of many women who cohabit to retain a separate self. It also acts as a discursive site from which to negotiate the level of one's involvement:

*Vivienne:* So is living with someone without being married a way of retaining a separate identity?

*Nina:* Yeah. I don't really know how to answer that. Like, 'what does it mean to me?' It is definitely that and it is a way of regulating perhaps how much you get involved too.

Like you can really jump in and be supportive and give a hand and all that. And then when you don't want to be supportive and help out you don't have to be because— Do you know what I mean?

*Vivienne:* Is it a way of retaining more space for yourself?

*Nina:* I suppose it is a bit of a safety catch really in a way too.

*Vivienne:* Can you explain that?

*Nina:* Um (pause) well ... I do see it as being a bit of a safety catch for me as in just keeping myself perhaps safe from being lost in something.

### III

Marriage resisting heterosexual cohabitantes resist their inscription within a discursive practice that they (along with many feminists) believe is problematic for heterosexual women because of its role in the re/production of inequitable gender relations. Living together as marriage resistance can therefore be conceptualised as an oppositional practice used by heterosexual women (and men) that is directed against marriage as the culturally prescribed form of living long-term heterosexual relations. Already constituted within heterosexual discourse, their opposition takes the form of resistance to inclusion:

*Michele:* ...I mean it is certainly a decision that you have to keep on making and making because people keep reminding you about it.  
Whereas to be married is probably more in the back of your mind that you must be serious about it, this must not fail.  
But I don't think you have to keep reassessing your marriage in the same way because people aren't putting it to you all the time, 'Why?' you know, 'why are you married?' They don't keep saying that, but they will say, 'Why are you not married?'

The relationship of homosexual couples to marital discourse is vastly different.<sup>7</sup> Marital discourse, in its current form, differentiates between couples on the basis of sexual preference. As a result, the possibility of accepting a subject position within a marital discourse has been consistently denied homosexual couples thereby contributing to the ongoing marginal status of these relationships (Rosier 1991:15-6; Stoddard 1992:17-8; Johnson 1996:46; Stengel 1996:46; Kaplan 1997:204-6).

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<sup>7</sup> This is well illustrated by the work of Sherman (1992) and Weston (1991).

If we accept Laird's (1991:125; see also Della Fave 1991:22) argument that rituals, like weddings, promote the interests of certain social groups by elevating the status of particular discourses at the expense of others, then barring homosexual couples from participating in their own wedding rituals facilitates the subjugation of discourses of homosexuality at the same time as it legitimises discourses of heterosexual coupledness. Hence, the demand to be included within the parameters of marital discourse may constitute for lesbian women and gay men an important strategy of resistance:

For me this was a very political thing to do. You can't be more "out" about who you are and about wanting your relationship considered valid in society than to get married.

(*Nora* in Sherman 1992:114)

The negativity about marriage within the lesbian community comes from the 1970s' women's movement, which had a simplistic analysis of the family and marriage. As with a lot of stuff, if you take it from heterosexuals and "blop" it onto lesbians, you miss something. I think marriage has a different meaning for lesbians and gays.

(*Ruth* in Sherman 1992:176)

In other words, lesbian and gay couples may wish to oppose those who exercise power over them through the deployment of the exclusionary framework of marital discourse by drawing on anti-discrimination discourses to argue for the broadening of the terms of marital discourse to permit their inclusion.<sup>8</sup> Stoddart (1992:17) believes this strategy will not only have wide ramifications in terms of how homosexual people are received socially, but the impact of this change to marital discourse would reverberate through the heterosexual community:

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<sup>8</sup> See the *Fraser* debate on this issue in Chapter one, pp. 12-6.



Furthermore, marriage may be unattractive and even oppressive as it is currently structured and practiced, but enlarging the concept to embrace same-sex couples would necessarily transform it into something new. If two women can marry, or two men, marriage – even for heterosexuals – need not be a union of a “husband” and a “wife.” Extending the right to marry to gay people – that is abolishing the traditional gender requirements of marriage – can be one of the means, perhaps even the principal one, through which the institution divests itself of the sexist trappings of the past.

(Stoddart 1992:19).<sup>9</sup>

Resistant discourses, as this illustration highlights, are not entirely distinct from the discourse being resisted. Rather, the frequent inclusion within resistant discourses of aspects of the ‘original’ discourse leads to the simultaneous reproduction and subversion of that discourse.

Noting the different entry points of homosexual and heterosexual couples into the discursive field of marriage underlines the necessity of conceptualising resistance in relational terms. Foucault defines resistance as an irreducible opposite of relations of power ([1978] 1990:96). Thus our location within the network of power relations that comprise our social worlds shapes, but not in any deterministic sense, which discursive practices we may feel the need to oppose. It is important to acknowledge at this point that the positions we accept are dependent on our multiple discursive locations. So for instance, Sherman’s research elicited a variety of responses from lesbian women to the issue of marriage for lesbian couples: proof that politics does not inhere in identity.

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<sup>9</sup> This argument is also made in Johnson (1996:44); and used in *Baehr v Lewin*, as part of the justification for same-sex marriages in a case brought before the Supreme Court of the State of Hawaii in 1993 (cited Kaplan 1997:205). Weston (1991:205-6) makes a similar point in her work on the family and kinship ties amongst gays and lesbians in the San Francisco Bay Area.

To return to an issue I raised above, the resistant practice of one person, or group, may constitute compliance for others. Therefore the assessment of the political implications of a discursive practice like marriage can only be made contextually; that is, on the basis of an examination of our locations within the discourses that constitute the macro-social relations of gender, race, class and sexuality. Foucault contends that discourses, and the practices they support, are not simply instruments of power, rather they are tactical elements which can be used strategically: the same discourse may be used both to bolster and to contest the operation of power (Foucault [1978] 1990:100-2).

#### IV

In instituting a new social practice — long-term intimate relationships outside of marriage — the cohabitees with whom I spoke were simultaneously confronted with an opportunity and a dilemma: how were they refer to their significant other (see Chandler 1991:56)? Although an anti-discourse can provide the basis for a sustained critique of a social practice like marriage, it is unable to answer this question. To find an acceptable alternative, cohabitees can, and do, borrow terms from other discourses that constitute intimate or co-residential relations; thus, 'flatmate', 'boyfriend', 'girlfriend', 'lover', 'de facto' were all used in different contexts by those who cohabit.<sup>10</sup>

When any one of these names is used, it encourages the development of an understanding of the cohabitational relationship through the parameters provided by the signifier's discourse of origin. 'Boyfriend' and 'girlfriend', for example, are central terms within 'courting' discourse that are usually applied to newly formed

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<sup>10</sup> Flatmates are generally non-related people who share a house and the associated expenses like rent, electricity, phone and often food.

couples. As a result, to construct a relationship through the use of these terms is to suggest that the ties that bind the couple together may be susceptible to changes of whim, or that they are a prelude to becoming 'husband' and 'wife'. While 'lover' literally means the person who loves and is loved, and hence promotes a view of the cohabitational relationship as primarily to do with a culturally celebrated human activity, loving another, it is also often associated with (illicit) sexual relationships and suggests that personal intimacy is limited to just one dimension.

The adoption of signifiers from other discourses thus facilitates a particular construction of the cohabitational relationship. Yet such constructions might not always mesh with the meanings that cohabitees ideally want to attach to themselves and their relationships. For instance, cohabitees may, in some contexts, want greater significance to be attributed to their relationships than is generally granted to those formed within either the discourse of 'courting', or the discourse of 'affairs'. In order to meet this requirement 'marriage resisters' need to produce a new discourse, a counter-discourse if you like, that permits the recrafting of the identities made available to members of heterosexual couples through other discourses.

The counter-discourse of living together as marriage resistance is notable for its importation of a signifier — 'partner' — whose currency within the discursive field of intimate relationships has been limited historically.<sup>11</sup> As several women said, 'we are partners in life' (Stephanie and Nina). The use of 'partner' elevates the status of living together by suggesting that intimate partnerships entail a level of involvement in each other's lives that is more typical of marriage, yet it also provides an identity that is distinct from the subordinate 'wife' (or dominant 'husband'). One woman summed it up in the following manner:

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, the use of 'partner' is not confined to unmarried heterosexual couples. It is also in widespread use amongst homosexual couples, and, as I shall discuss later, is a term used by married couples who wish to resist the conventional hierarchical construction of marriage.

*Rachel:* But I like the term partner because it gives that impression that we are equal and that I consider our relationship to be a partnership and not a marriage. Because a marriage, when you look at the word marriage it is a joining together, whereas a partnership is a mutual use of resources and abilities to achieve a common goal.

Constituting the subjectivities of heterosexual couples who live together through the construct of partnership has several advantages. Unlike 'wife' or 'husband', partner is a gender neutral term that does not imply a hierarchy. In fact, the equality of partners is presumed: exceptions to this rule are indicated through the use of adjectives like junior or senior. Moreover, within a partnership the identities of those involved do not symbolically merge to create one, thus two separate and autonomous identities continue to be represented.

Despite noting these advantages, cohabitees do not embrace the use of 'partner' without reservation (see Chandler 1991:56). To begin with, 'partner' is also a key signifier in commercial discourses. An initial introduction using the word 'partner' may cause some confusion. Does the relationship acquire its status as a partnership within the public world of business or does it refer to an intimate relationship?:

*Lisa:* ...But it [partner] is still not the right word because people, I mean for a start people mistake it for your business partner which gets quite tricky.

*Vivienne:* Have you had that happen?

*Lisa:* Quite often. Oh they go, 'Are you in business?' And you go, 'No!'

Business partnerships are formed within discourses of capitalism and are underpinned by a profit motive. But the notion of material profit is so antithetical to our conceptions of emotional ties as to be almost obscene (Meyer 1991:23). The cultural clash between discourses of love and discourses of money-making means

that the construction of cohabitation as an 'intimate partnership' is met with a certain amount of ambivalence. Hence, the use of 'partner' is often accepted 'by default because there is nothing, no better word for it' (Lisa).

If the meaning of 'partner' is uncertain because of its dual discursive location, then the variety of inflections given to it within the discursive field of coupledness may also make its use problematic. One woman defined her understanding of the term in the following way:

*Vivienne:* How do you think others understand the use of the word partner?

*Paula:* I think that most of the people that I know ... understand fully well that I am referring to a person that I am living with and having a long term relationship with, as far as I know. I think it is becoming a lot more accepted as a term. (five sentences later...) It sort of gives the information that these people are in a relationship in the nature of marriage, but aren't married.

When 'partner' is given the above meaning it operates to set up and collapse simultaneously a point of distinction between cohabitation and marriage. Marriage is defined as the norm, the point of reference whereby cohabitation can be rendered inferior. From the perspective of those who occupy a position in that version of marital discourse that stresses its moral superiority, 'partner' acts to signify deviancy:

*Michele:* ...maybe partner is also leading to the de facto idea which is the, you know, I am doing something odd. And I don't see living together as something odd.

On the other hand, the definition of intimate partnerships as relationships 'in the nature of marriage' serves to erase the line of distinction between cohabitation and marriage to which 'marriage resisters' are indebted. The potential for 'partner' to signify marriage resistance is further undermined by its increasing use, within certain arenas of the state, aspects of the media, and by married couples

who wish to signify their resistance to the hierarchical relationship implied by 'husband' and 'wife', as a catch-all term to describe all types of couple relationships, irrespective of legal status and/or sexual orientation. In part, this development can be understood as a response to the need, given the growing number of people who live in coupled relationships outside of marriage and who, at times, confront similar dilemmas, to find a single word that can refer to all of these people. Regardless of its social origin, this meaning of 'partner' serves to homogenise cohabitational and marital relationships.

## V

The foregoing paragraphs attest to the existence of a struggle over how 'partner' should be understood. Of course, these disputes over meaning gain their significance from what they can tell us about: the operation of power, the limits of resistance, and the implications that follow when one definition is settled on as 'the truth' rather than another (Yeatman 1990:155; Weston 1991:5; Nippert-Eng 1995:xii). To elaborate, it is possible to identify the person (or persons) who exercises power within a setting by noting which discourse comes to prevail as the representation of 'reality' from amongst the pool of possible discourses that compete for that status. Put more simply, whether 'partner' comes to be understood as referring to a business relationship, an intimate relationship that is characterised by equality, or a form of marriage, is indicative of the relative power of these discourses and of those who deploy them.

How one responds to the repercussions that follow from the various meanings attributed to 'partner' is dependent on the perceived severity of the repercussions, the nature of the power relations that constitute a particular context, and an individual's location within other discourses. In the following discussion I

want to build on this statement by exploring the responses of one woman to the identities made available to her within the power-laden settings of everyday life.

For those who uphold the sanctity of marriage, the foreignness of 'partner' within conventional coupled discourses makes it a nonsensical term, it lacks a referent. One must be either a girlfriend/boyfriend, fiancé/fiancée or husband/wife, depending on your gender of course. Confronted with 'partner' some people respond by turning 'partner' into something that has meaning within their narrative of heterosexual relationships and marriage:

*Lisa:* ...Although the office calls him my husband, which is quite interesting.

*Vivienne:* Really?

*Lisa:* You know with my permission. But they can't deal, people within the office can't deal with this 'partner' business. And they always call him, you know, 'Your hubby' or 'Your husband.'

Lisa's use of the word 'permission' here suggests that Lisa believes she is in control of how her relationship is constituted, that she could insist on a different construction of her relationship, but that it is Lisa who finds these alternatives unattractive. However, 'partner' is meaningless to the people she works with and thus her choice of terms is constrained to 'boyfriend', 'husband' or 'lover'. Kondo describes this intervention by others in the definition of our identities as the 'disciplinary production of "selves"' (Kondo 1990:26 & 43). Power operates through this intervention to narrow the scope of available subject positions by marginalising and making unattractive resistant subject positions, thereby effectively policing these subjectivities (Weedon 1987:91).

But the exercise of power does not exclude the possibility of agency as Lisa's use of the term 'permission' indicates. Although Lisa's range is narrowed she nevertheless exercises choice. Lisa settles on 'husband' rather than 'boyfriend' because of the consequences that follow from choosing the former:

*Vivienne:* So they view you —?

*Lisa:* As married.

*Vivienne:* How do feel about that?

*Lisa:* I don't really mind because it means that my relationship with him is taken seriously.

An interpretation of her as married has the advantage of providing Lisa's relationship with recognition at work, it is 'taken seriously'.

Lisa's deployment of marital discourse instead of cohabitational discourse demonstrates her ability to exercise agency in the context of the power relations that constitute her workplace, however, in this instance agency is not the same as resistance. In this setting, Lisa's choice of 'husband', and the subsequent construction of her relationship with Philip as one of marriage, represents compliance. In so doing, Lisa reinstates the dominance of marital discourse within the discursive field of heterosexual coupledness, and the marginality of cohabitation as an 'intimate partnership'.

Lisa's compliance is, however, limited to certain contexts. While passing as married at work Lisa insists on a non-marital identity in other crucial settings; for instance, with her partner Philip, friends, and the Income Support Services (ISS) division of Department of Social Welfare (DSW). In adopting these strategic positionings Lisa situates herself in ways she believes are personally advantageous. Thus we might envisage Lisa as a strategic actor who deploys 'culturally available meanings' (Kondo 1990:24) to encourage the people she comes into contact with in the course of her everyday life to reach certain understandings of her-self and the nature of her relationship with Philip.

Yet Lisa is not the sole determinant of the identities on offer and consequently the identities she assumes. The options made available to Lisa in each setting are the effect of the contextual interaction of power and discourse. Those who already hold a position of power with respect to Lisa can make it difficult for her to occupy a subject position within the discourse of 'living together



as marriage resistance'; they can thwart her (Moore 1994:66-7). This process occurs through the mobilisation of their preferred discursive framework at the same time as they refuse to acknowledge the existence and legitimacy of cohabitation as marriage resistance (see Davies 1991:48; Moore 1994:66-7). At one level, the abandonment of a preferred subject position confirms the power of dominant discourses. On the other hand such concessions, because they forestall the negative repercussions that follow from the retention of the 'original' subject position, can stave off an even greater loss of power.

Clearly, identity is a site of struggle that entails the exercise of power through the deployment (and counter deployment) of discourse. The outcome of this intervention of power in the construction of the self is the contextual assertion of identity or 'selves in the plural' (Kondo 1990:43). As Kondo states:

Suffice to say that the plethora of available "I's" throws into relief the multiple ways people present themselves and their identities in particular situations. You are not an "I" untouched by context, rather you are defined by the context. One could argue that identity and context are inseparable, calling into question the very distinction between the two.

(Kondo 1990:29)

## VI

My discussion of living together as marriage resistance in this chapter has been directed towards the development of a postmodern feminist concept of the subject that is strongly influenced by foucauldian theory. The foucauldian subject is constantly caught in a contradiction: she is simultaneously determined and determining; she is the sub/ject that chooses. The use of the verb 'to choose' in this phrase alerts us to the capacity of the foucauldian subject to exercise agency. However, the recognition of our/selves as people who engage in acts of choice can

blind us to the operation of power in our lives (see Foucault [1978] 1990:86). We forget that we are also sub/jects whose lives are regulated through the definition of the 'parameters of the contents of choice' (Henriques et al. 1984:219; see also Davies 1991:46).

Lisa's discussion of the various terminologies in use to refer to coupled relations illustrates this point. Although 'partner' is the most fitting term of address for her relationship with Philip, her use of this term at work is foreclosed. Despite this, Lisa continues to represent herself as someone who exercises choice; and so she does. However, Lisa's choices are circumscribed. The imposition of constraining forces in our lives, through a limitation on our range of choices, is indicative of one form of the exercise of power. Coming to this understanding, prompts a view of lives that are regulated: in short, of people that are sub/jects, as well as subjects.

The restrictions we face in our access to subject positions points to the need, when contemplating the micro-politics of resistance and agency, to examine the social context in which these acts are situated. By paying attention to context it is possible to make claims about how power is exercised. This kind of attentiveness leads to an acknowledgment that the fate of a resistant discursive practice is not settled in the discursive arena alone and encourages an examination of the social and economic climate in which resistance acts are located (Soper 1993:34). Hindrances to the success of resistant practices do not signal the defeat of strategies of resistance, rather their presence points to the cyclical nature of the project of resistance politics. In other words, resistance to the exercise of power, that aims at its eventual transformation, proceeds via strategy and counter-strategy.

## MANAGING SELVES II: THE UNRULY CONSEQUENCES OF 'DIFFERENCE'

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For the line dividing *I* and *Not-I*, *us* and *them* or *him* and *her* is not (cannot) always (be) as clear as we would like it to be. Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain and mend, categories always leak.

(Trinh 1989:94)

This chapter is concerned with culturally available dividing lines, categories of difference, and leakages. The installation of a dividing line is frequently considered problematic because of the material, psychological and emotional difficulties that often arise from its exclusionary effects (see for example, Weston 1991). Yet discursively produced categories of difference also operate as resources for the construction of contextually asserted identities. It is through lines of distinction that we produce our/selves as people who are both similar to, and different from, others (Trinh 1991:73).

'Doing difference' is an important way in which individuals engage in the micro-politics of everyday life. In the context of conceptualising a postmodernist account of agency, differences can be likened to useful tools. As tools, differences

are worked and reworked in power-laden sites to produce shifting lines of inclusion and exclusion, often with contradictory, and sometimes unpredictable, consequences. Yet it is not only the placement of lines of demarcation that is of importance. Also at stake are the variable meanings attached to socially constructed differences. It matters if cohabitation is rendered an immoral practice, viewed as simply a step on the way to marriage, or understood to be a viable and equal alternative to marriage.

Negotiating cultural categories of difference involves people in the performance of what Nippert-Eng refers to as 'boundary work' (1995:xiii & 7). Boundary work 'is the never-ending process through which boundaries [between the self and the other] are negotiated, placed, maintained and transformed by individuals over time' (Nippert-Eng 1995:xiii; see also Weston 1991:200). It is the negotiation of the boundary between cohabitation and marriage, and the variable meanings attached to membership in these categories within shifting sets of power relations, that is my primary concern in this chapter and throughout this thesis.

For marriage resisting cohabitees, the retention of a line of distinction between themselves and married couples is vital. It is through the maintenance of this divide, and the subsequent attribution of particular meanings to cohabitation and marriage, that they can represent themselves as resistant actors. At critical moments, the cohabitees with whom I spoke had an interest in contrasting their relationships with those of married individuals. Shifts and changes in context, however, led them to revisit this categorisation. At times, in the face of criticisms and incomprehension, cohabitees appropriated some of the symbols and conventions of marriage in order to gain the social recognition and rewards granted to married couples. Ironically, for cohabitees engaged in marriage resistance, these manoeuvres blurred the boundary between cohabitation and marriage, and demonstrated the leaky nature of these categories.

## I

Although not inevitably invoked, the distinction between heterosexual cohabitation and marriage is nevertheless widely recognised because it has been institutionalised within a number of socially significant sites. For instance, while subject to historical shifts, the conditions of entry into, and exit from, marriage have come to be stipulated by the state, whereas cohabitation is simply a personal living circumstance (Smart 1984:112; Parker, S. 1990:5; Atkin 1991:6 & 13).<sup>1</sup> The state automatically grants a number of protections and privileges to married individuals that are not available as of right to the unmarried. For example, as the law in New Zealand currently stands, cohabitees (heterosexual and homosexual) are not covered by the Matrimonial Property Act 1976, nor are they guaranteed beneficiaries should their partners die intestate (i.e., without a will).<sup>2</sup>

Yet even within the realm of the state, the retention of a distinction between marital and non-marital heterosexual couples who co-reside does not automatically lead to differences in treatment. Under what is known as the 'cohabitation rule', the access of heterosexual cohabitees to state income support is, like married couples, determined by a joint income test. Women who cohabit with men can also avail themselves of the protection against violent partners afforded by the Domestic Violence Act 1995.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In countries such as New Zealand, whose legal history is entwined with that of England and Wales, the first significant piece of legislation dealing with marital relations was Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753. In New Zealand, the relevant pieces of current legislation are the Marriage Act 1955 and the Family Proceedings Act 1980. For a background of the history of marital law see Smart (1984) and S. Parker (1990).

<sup>2</sup> See Atkin (1991) for a full discussion of the legal situation of unmarried cohabitees in New Zealand.

<sup>3</sup> With the passing of the Domestic Protection Act 1982 the law ceased to distinguish between married and non-married heterosexual couples who live together for the

Even though the extension by the state of some of the obligations and protections of marriage to heterosexual cohabitantes on an *ad hoc* basis contributes to the blurring of the boundaries between cohabitation and marriage, the State nonetheless continues to affirm marriage as the ideal structure for intimate relationships by preserving the Marriage Act 1955 and its restrictive focus intact. Thus marriage retains its special character as the most privileged form of coupled relations, while cohabitation is re/produced as the 'other' whose social existence is tolerated, but not championed.

The state is not the only social site in which the distinction between marriage, as the preferred form of intimate relationships, and cohabitation, as the 'other', is re/produced and given meaning. Most forms of popular media give precedence to marriage and heterosexuality as they replay the marital narrative with monotonous regularity. Christian churches form another highly significant site in which marriage is constituted as the norm. Most marriages begin with a wedding that still often takes place under the aegis of the church.<sup>4</sup> Prominent strands of Christian doctrine continue to portray cohabitation as immoral; hence, the epithet 'living in sin'. Each time marriage is made into a public event it is installed, once again, as the culturally prescribed form for coupled relations. Marriage thus becomes the social standard against which other ways of living intimate relationships, including heterosexual cohabitation outside of marriage, are measured and found wanting.

Located on the cohabitational side of the divide, marriage resisting cohabitantes depend on this culturally constructed difference to make their resistant

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purposes of protection against a violent partner. While the Domestic Violence Act 1995 continues to provide married and cohabiting couples with legal protections, it has also widened its protective embrace to include a whole raft of domestic relationships. For example, under the Domestic Violence Act 1995 a lesbian woman can apply for a protection order against her partner.

<sup>4</sup> There has, however, been a significant shift over the last decade away from Church based weddings. Increasingly weddings take place in domestic settings, with marriage celebrants officiating the 'service'.

practice meaningful. Yet the meanings they attach to cohabitation and marriage do not conform to dominant renditions. Marriage resisting cohabitees, in their counter-discourse, utilise the categories made available within marital discourses, but they reverse the values normally assigned to cohabitation and marriage. In other words, within this counter-discourse cohabitation occupies the privileged position, while marriage is constructed negatively.

This reverse ranking is established, in part, by using the discourse of 'freedom' — valued by both cohabiting and married couples — to challenge the privileged position of marriage as a form of coupledness. From this vantage point, marriage is characterised as a socially defined institution that constrains those who take part in it. This idea is given a colourful gloss in the following image:

*Duncan:* ...I reckoned it was a bit like a monkey sitting on the sand eating bananas, perfectly happy and so on. Put a cage over it, it's still a monkey, still sitting on the sand, still eating a banana, but it's not happy.

*Vivienne:* And that's how you feel about marriage?

*Duncan:* Ah yeah (laughs).

Cohabitation, on the other hand, is viewed as being free from social prescriptions. Hence, many of the marriage resisting cohabitees with whom I spoke chose to cohabit in the belief that their relationships were unencumbered by societal expectations and, as a result, more authentically their own:

*Lisa:* ...my feeling is that if we got married a lot of our, almost our decision making rights, or our control over our lives, is taken away because society places certain expectations on married couples.

According to this analysis, those who cohabit may be constrained by expectations, but they are not imposed on them by an institution, rather they are the outcome of negotiations that have occurred within their particular relationship.

An analogy related to me during a casual conversation aptly illustrates this way of defining the relationship between marriage and cohabitation. In this account, marriage was likened to a house that has already been built – all one has to do is occupy it. Cohabitation, on the other hand, requires those who wish to dwell within its walls to build the shelter first. As a consequence, the house may incorporate some of the materials used to build the marital house, but nevertheless be designed to fit the unique needs and desires of individual cohabitees.

In conceptualising the details of this distinction, cohabitees as marriage resisters describe marriage in ways which already inscribe resistance. 'Marriage' is the construction against which cohabitation as marriage resistance is defined. Understanding cohabitation as a resistant practice, therefore, requires an analysis of how marital discourse is constituted by marriage resisting cohabitees. There are several critical sites within marital discourse around which this can occur: for instance, gendered roles, commitment, and monogamy. This chapter focuses on the construction of commitment within the discourse of cohabitation.

## II

Cohabitees who resist marriage believe that a significant area of difference between their discourse on intimate relationships and marital discourse is traceable to how the 'we' is constructed within these two discourses. According to these cohabitees marriage represents a promise of a permanent future together. In this sense, marriage signifies an ongoing commitment to a particular relationship, come what may. While this is often construed positively as something that strengthens the relationship, the marriage resisting cohabitees I spoke to interpreted this negatively as the formation of a tie that cements two individuals together and constricts further personal development:



*Rachel:* ...one thing I have against marriage is that you are locking yourself into something. And you are saying, 'I am not going to change. We are not going to change. We are always going to be the same as we are on this day.' and you have got to give yourself room to grow and change.

From this perspective, marriage operates to trap people at a fixed point in their personal history. It pins married individuals to choices they made at some stage in their past. Hence, marriage is conceptualised as a threat to individual freedom.

This viewpoint is reinforced by the knowledge that the dissolution of a marriage (unlike the end of cohabitees' relationships) is only complete when it has been registered by the Family Court:

*Philip:* ... And it is really hard to get out of marriage.

*Vivienne:* Do you think so?

*Philip:* Well if you find that it doesn't suit you there is a hell of a rigmarole to go through. You can't just wake up in the morning and say, 'Right that's it. We are not married any more.' You have to go through all this time of being separated and you know all the other sort of stuff. It seems like it is not something that you would do at the drop of a hat.

It was not only the legal or practical difficulties, and the way in which these might tie married individuals together, that concerned marriage resisters. Many also raised the issue that constituting oneself as a married individual automatically created the previously excluded possibility that one might become a 'divorcee' at some point in the future. Given their construction of divorce as a 'failed marriage' one of the consequences of marriage is the unnecessary exposure to the risk of failure:

*Rebecca:* ...And also if you get married it means that you can fail. It means that if it doesn't work you are a failure. You are saying to everybody, 'Hello. I am doing this now. And I intend to do this for the rest of my

life.' And when you break up you have failed. What is the point of doing something that can only fail? No. No, not necessarily, but you see you are saying, 'Well here I am, let's see how long it lasts. Let's see if I won't fail.'

Thus, lying latent within marital discourse is the undesirable identity of 'divorcee', an identity only available to those who marry and not to those who cohabit.

In contrast, the end of cohabitational relationships is often seen as both free from social disgrace and 'not as messy':

*Vivienne:* So you don't think that sort of failure notion would be applied if you and Philip broke-up?

*Lisa:* Not in the same way for some reason.

*Vivienne:* Perhaps because people don't expect it to last ...?

*Lisa:* Yeah, perhaps. But if you say that you have broken up with your boyfriend, or with your partner, people are actually going to take less notice of that. Perhaps people are going to take less notice of that than if I said I got divorced. And even though I don't care very much about what people think it is the amount attention they are going to focus on you and your relationship is different somehow.

The demise of a cohabitational relationship is thought to be more of a matter for the couple themselves, and less of a societal issue requiring state input. Certainly cohabitees do not have available to them the identity of 'divorcee'. Yet the lack of social recognition accorded to those who live together may be double edged. As I have already noted, cohabitational relationships are not covered by the Matrimonial Property Act 1976, hence cohabitees cannot turn to the Family Court, following a separation, to have their property disputes adjudicated. Instead such matters are dealt with by the High Court, a much more difficult and costly

process.<sup>5</sup> As a result, establishing themselves as separate, rather than together, may be something cohabitantes can not do 'at the drop of a hat'.

The corollary of the perception that living together is free from many of the legal and social repercussions that accompany marital breakdown is the view that cohabitation lacks marriage's constraining effects, and is therefore a more fragile relational form. The element of constraint, according to Stanley and Markman (1992:595-6), is more productive of committed relationships than personal dedication. Constraints which induce commitment are children; shared property; the social pressure that is exerted to maintain a relationship; the difficulty, or ease, with which a relationship can be ended; and the acceptability of divorce (Stanley & Markman 1992:596).

The reason for the supposed fragility of cohabitational relationships can thus be attributed to the absence of some of the facets of commitment based on constraint. While the validity of such an interpretation might be conceded by some of the people I interviewed, it was also countered in the following manner:

*Vivienne:* Would you say then that living together is a more fragile bond than marriage?

*Rachel:* No I think it is stronger.

*Vivienne:* Why?

*Rachel:* Because it is choice. I could leave tomorrow if I really wanted to, but in marriage there is more of that, 'we have got to make a go of it and have at least one more try,' or whatever. But you know we are here because we want to be.

Here the question of commitment derived from constraint is given a negative inflection as Rachel suggests that her desire to continue to live together with Andrew stems from a superior motive — choice. In promising only that 'I love you

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<sup>5</sup> However, where cohabiting couples have children the Family Court deals with issues relating to custody and access on the same basis as married couples.

today and I hope I will tomorrow' (Michele), marriage resisting cohabitantes insist that this does not mean that they are any less committed to their relationships. In fact, the opposite is the case. They have to be more committed because their relationships are held together by choice alone, and not through the constraining impact of societal sanctions, religious dogma or state regulations.

Once again this construction of the difference between cohabitation and marriage draws on an association of cohabitation with choice and freedom, while marriage is linked with compulsion and constraint. Ironically, the way in which the 'open door' policy of cohabitation might operate as a constraining force within these relationships is often ignored.<sup>6</sup> Also ignored is the extent to which marriage as a permanent bond has been undermined by the arrival of demand driven divorce. Furthermore, this construction underestimates the degree to which children and shared property can bind people together despite the relative informality of their relationships.

Given a frame of reference that aligns cohabitation with choice and marriage with externally imposed expectations, constraints and commitment, it is not surprising that many cohabitantes believe that a move from living together to marriage would adversely affect their relationships. This sentiment was expressed in the following manner by one person:

*Vivienne:* If you were to get married would you expect it to change your relationship with Lisa?

*Philip:* Well I don't know. Having never been married I can't really say. There is a funny phenomena – I don't know if it is true or whether it is just imagination – ...of people who spend years together in a really good relationship and suddenly they get married and it fucks up. And it seems that the reason it fucks up is because- It shouldn't should it? ... I mean marriage is like –

*Vivienne:* A piece of paper.

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<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion of this point see Chapter six.

*Philip:* Just a tick isn't it. But what happens is that they start to assume these unreal roles within the context of this marriage thing.... I mean I think it is a very strong thing, socially and culturally, this marriage thing. ... Suddenly they get married and it seems that the bogey of the social expectations of roles rears and takes over. And she starts playing wife, or resists playing wifey. He starts playing hubby or resists playing hubby.

And the whole fucking thing just goes, you know, ahh. Whereas before it was all right because they weren't playing out roles they were being real. Just being two people.

Philip suggests that a shift from cohabitation to marriage can lead to the adoption, or the overt and disruptive resistance, of socially ordained identities and practices. Once married the subject positions of 'wife' and 'husband' become available to individuals, and these may be accepted or resisted with negative consequences for the relationship. For those who marry, agency is limited to the acceptance or rejection of singularly defined roles. Personal variation and innovation is withheld from them.

While there are obvious difficulties with this position, not the least that it fails to recognise the multiple ways in which marriage is, and has been, defined, I nevertheless believe there are theoretical reasons for giving the general thrust of Philip's argument some credence. If subjectivity is, as I suggested in Chapter two, the outcome of our location within discourse, then who we are is dependent on the particular distinctions and oppositions established by that discourse, both between the various subject positions on offer within that discourse, and also between the subject positions on offer in other discourses. To elaborate, accepting a subject position within, for example, marital discourse, is a meaningful act precisely because it provides certain understandings of the self (e.g., wife/husband; daughter-in-law/son-in-law; sister-in-law/brother-in-law; etc.) and the nature of the relationships constituted through that discourse that differ from those

produced within other discourses, for instance 'singles' discourse or lesbian and gay discourses, and discourses on other forms of coupled relations.

Philip's analysis of marriage as a constraint is consistent with Smart's contention that '[marriage] is an ideological enclosure that confers identity and meaning' (1984:143). Ultimately, individuals do not control the way in which marriage (or cohabitation for that matter) is understood. What these statements ignore, however, is that the meanings attributed to marriage (and cohabitation) are only ever provisional, the outcome of the negotiated settlements in power laden sites such as family gatherings, the Courts, and so on. While some meanings of marriage may come to dominate the social sphere, other discourses may coexist providing the possibilities of engaging in alternative practices by married couples. In other words, the meaning of marital relationships is not monolithic but multiple. Furthermore, subjects and social practices as lived are never simply the products of a single discourse; rather, they are constituted through a variety of discourses that enable variation from the pure abstracted form to occur (see Valverde 1991:183).

Philip's rendition of the relationship between cohabitation and marriage does not acknowledge the way in which cohabitation is also socially defined, even if this is only by virtue of antinomy. Philip's position, and the position of most of the other marriage resisting cohabitantes with whom I talked, is dependent on a pre-existing social distinction between cohabitation and marriage to provide their activity with significance. Yet they are not the sole determiners of when this distinction is invoked and how it is given meaning. In the next section I want to give some attention to alternative constructions of cohabitation.

### III

The ongoing deployment of a line of difference between cohabitation and marriage within the counter-discourse of marriage resistance is not without risks. The simple reversal of the polar values attached to cohabitation and marriage within this discourse is readily undone. In more powerful discourses, cohabitation is not just a different model for living long-term relations, but an inferior or deviant relational form. Thus the distinction that underpins the strategy of cohabitation as marriage resistance can also be deployed to make the continued occupation of a resistant position within cohabitational discourse more difficult.

This last statement requires some elaboration. How does the construction of an identity or practice as 'other' operate to control it? My responses to this question draw on foucauldian discussions of disciplinary power. Disciplinary power is that form of power that uses techniques of observation and/or measurement to produce subjects who can be governed both by themselves and by others (Foucault [1975] 1979:199-203, 1982:212). The first requirement of a disciplinary system is the establishment of a social norm, or standard, that acts as the point of comparison (Foucault [1975] 1979:199 & 208; Fraser 1989:44). However, this can only be achieved relationally through the institution of an opposition between something (or someone) that is designated 'normal' and another thing (or person) that is recognised, within the terms of dominant discourses, as 'abnormal'. I would argue that this is the case with marriage and cohabitation. Marriage has been installed socially, by such agents as the Christian church and the state, as the legitimated form for adult intimacy, while cohabitation has been constructed as the inferior 'other'. Attempts by cohabitees to construct cohabitation resistantly as superior by virtue of being 'other' are open to being co-opted by those who would construct its otherness as 'abnormal' and 'inferior'.

To establish a social norm requires a mechanism that enables people's behaviours to be monitored. Foucault offers the panopticon as the idealised structure of surveillance (Foucault [1975] 1979:200-2, 1980:147-8 & 154-8). The panopticon is comprised of a system of back lit cells that surround a centralised watchtower. The occupants of the cells are clearly visible to the guard in the watchtower, but cannot determine when they are actually being observed. A power relationship is thus formed based on the unidirectional nature of the gaze between the guard and cell inhabitants. Fearing their constant surveillance, the occupants of the cells subject themselves to surveillance obviating the need for more overt forms of intervention in their lives. Hence, we have the self-policing sub/ject, the subject who abandons previously held positions as they take up subjectivities that conform to others' expectations, thereby avoiding the negative sanctions that follow from external sources of surveillance.

The sheer physicality of the panopticon suggests that disciplinary power operates within clearly delineated structures. It can, however, operate more subtly. It is a form of power that is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere: 'the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular' (Bartky 1988:74; see also Foucault [1975] 1979:202; Fraser 1989:45). In our everyday lives disciplinary power is frequently installed through the imposition by other people of alternative definitions of the self: or through what Kondo calls the 'disciplinary production of "selves"' (1990:26 & 43). Such interventions signal the unacceptability, within that context, of our preferred discursive allegiances (Kondo 1990:10, 12 & 25; Davies 1991:48-9).

The 'disciplinary production of selves' can take two forms. Firstly, the definitions we have of our/selves can be overturned through the ascription to us of different identities by others. Or secondly, the categories through which our identities are constituted can be relocated by other people within different discourses, thus providing them with new meanings. Both mechanisms for



disciplining selves can lead to outcomes that make our own discursive definitions of our/selves more difficult to maintain ( Kondo 1990:11-13; Davies 1991:48-9; Moore 1994:67). In some instances it may even provoke their abandonment as we collude in the recasting of ourselves (Kondo 1990:14). However, conformity is not inevitable. The responses people have to the 'disciplinary production of selves' are dependent on their location within other discourses, and thus can be highly variable.

The avenues through which people can be alerted to their non-conformist positions are multiple. Hence, the 'disciplinary production of selves' can occur through a number of different sites. This was made apparent in several of the comments made by the cohabitees with whom I spoke. For instance, one arena of disciplinary intervention is the use of the term 'de facto' to describe couples who live together outside of marriage. On the face of it this term appears quite neutral. On the other hand, as many of the people I interviewed pointed out, its usage tends to be restricted to those occasions when cohabitees are in trouble; thus, 'de facto' is the term of choice when reporting Court news, but is hardly ever drawn on when Kim Hill (a reporter with Radio New Zealand's National Programme) discusses the emotional demands of living in long-term relationships with family therapists. (In this setting, 'partners' seems to be the term in current vogue). Constituted as a 'de facto' relationship cohabitation becomes a stigmatised version of marriage that permits the assimilation of those resisting marriage into a 'marriage like' model of heterosexual relationships. Within this discursive construction, cohabitation is merely an inferior relational form, and not an alternative that challenges the gendered basis on which dominant versions of marital discourse have been constituted.

Because the cohabitees I interviewed were seldom directly confronted with the construction of themselves as 'de facto' couples, this disciplinary intervention was easily ignored; not so other disciplinary acts. For example, one woman

recounted the difficulties she faced when trying to locate her first flat in the early 1980s:

*Rebecca:* ...‘Are you married?’ was the first question they [landlords] asked. You would say ‘No.’ And then we would find out that we hadn’t got the flat. And you know it seemed so important that they asked us first, ‘Are you married?’ not if we had jobs or if we could afford to pay the rent. No, that wasn’t important.

It seems that landlords may have assumed that Rebecca and her partner Brett’s non-conformity with respect to marriage meant that they would also be non-conformists in such matters as the care of the flat and the payment of rent. By asking Brett’s mother to accompany them on their flat finding mission, Rebecca and Brett overcame the question of their respectability and presumed reliability.

Although discriminatory treatment by landlords appears to have disappeared as an issue in the 1990s, most of the cohabitees I spoke to continued to be interrogated, in various contexts, over their failure to change their marital status.<sup>7</sup> These challenges could be infrequent and consequently constructed as an expressed preference that had minimal effect. Alternatively, they might be an almost guaranteed feature of social interactions with family and friends that is experienced as overt pressure. They also ranged in style from minor teasing over whether a date for a wedding would ever be set to more direct questions:

*Vivienne:* Did your mother ever suggest that you should get married? Was that part of her agenda?

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<sup>7</sup> The amount of pressure these cohabitees experienced to get married varied from generalised social pressure that had little impact on them, to repeated comments by family members, friends and workmates that were considerably more difficult to ignore. Geographic distance from parents contributed to an enhanced ability to resist the pressure to get married. The death of parents, episodes of parental cohabitation prior to remarriage, or sibling cohabitation lowered the level of pressure experienced.

*Rachel:* No, she never hassled us about getting married, but other people did. At the restaurant, because we met at the restaurant— I had been working at the restaurant for over a year before we started going out and then going out and then living together. And it was like all the time, 'Oh when are you two going to get engaged? Aren't you two going to get married? Didn't Santa bring you a ring for Xmas?' We got that for two years.

The frequent raising of the possibility of marriage is indicative of the position marriage occupies as the standard form for long-term heterosexual relations. Against this standard, cohabitation should at best be considered a 'trial marriage'.<sup>8</sup> Looking at cohabitation as a prelude to marriage tends to diffuse its challenge: cohabitation becomes simply another stage within the institution of marriage, rather than a parallel institution.

Although questioning about relational status was directed at both men and women, it was not uncommon for men to be constructed as more resistant to the idea of marriage. As a result, when pressure was brought to bear by parents and friends they frequently targeted women. Women are constituted as more susceptible to such entreaties, not only because it is their sexual reputation that is at stake, but the business of relationships is seen to be their province. On the occasions when men were confronted they were reminded that they had a duty to perform, that they needed to do the 'right thing': where doing the 'right thing' means ceding to the presumed wishes of their partners to get married and thereby making them 'honourable women':<sup>9</sup>

*Andrew:* ...Oh once I actually got a bit hassled about getting married. My friend's mother, they are a really straight Catholic family, and I was around there one day and ... she was saying, 'Don't you think you

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter nine (pp. 234-7) for a more elaborate discussion of this point.

<sup>9</sup> See my discussion of Michael in Chapter nine, pp. 239-40.

should ask Rachel to marry you? I am sure she would like you to.’  
And all that sort of stuff. It was quite funny.

Often the challenges to the marital status of the cohabitees I interviewed intensified when couples expected their first child. Sometimes this was a single statement suggesting that marriage was now obligatory and not an optional extra, whereupon the matter was allowed to drop. Others found that when they told their parents about the pregnancy the announcement was received coolly with the minimal ‘congratulations’ followed immediately by ‘You are not married!’ (Jane). These initial reactions usually preceded more sustained attempts to persuade couples to get married.<sup>10</sup>

Even when cohabitees were not directly confronted with the issue of marriage, they often became keenly aware that it might be ‘okay to live with someone but when you have a child ... you should be married’ (Michele). To illustrate how this regulatory pressure might be ‘experienced’ I want to quote at some length from my interview with Stephanie:

*Stephanie:* I was very conscious when I was pregnant that I wasn’t married and that um—

*Vivienne:* I guess people would have been asking you.

*Stephanie:* Not so much asking me directly, but you sort of picked up the disapproval. Not so much from people I knew, but from other people. You know they would make assumptions about you because you were pregnant...

*Vivienne:* What sorts of assumptions did you think they were making?

*Stephanie:* Um (short pause), more that I should be married.

*Vivienne:* Did it make any difference if they knew you were in a relationship?

*Stephanie:* It probably, yeah, I don’t know if it did or not. I suppose I knew what attitudes my parents had and that must have affected the way I perceived how other people perceived me. Yeah, because I know my

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<sup>10</sup> This issue is taken up again in Chapter nine, pp. 237-9.

perceived how other people perceived me. Yeah, because I know my parents can sometimes sit and have a very judgmental conversation about someone who is in exactly the same situation as I am. They won't be criticising me directly but –

When cohabitees, especially women, expect a child they often feel as if they have truly come to occupy one of the cells of the panopticon. In this example, it is Stephanie's parents who take up residence in the central watchtower. It is their moral gaze that Stephanie thinks of as she fills in the gaps left by others whose disapproval remains unstated. Positioned as a self-surveilling subject, Stephanie nevertheless refuses to succumb to the pressure to conform to conventions. At the time of the interview she remained unmarried.

Her refusal to locate herself within marital discourse is indicative of the limits of disciplinary power. Individuals can, and do, resist the exercise of disciplinary power in spite of their internalisation of its normalising gaze. In understanding why this might be the case two things need to be considered. Firstly, as Cooper (1994:438) asserts, the internalisation of a normalising gaze should not be equated with a belief in its viewpoint. It is possible to measure oneself according to the precepts of the gaze of the 'other' even as this gaze is criticised. Secondly, the rewards of compliance may be insufficient to offset the pleasures and satisfactions lost through the abandonment of censured positions. In Stephanie's case, it would seem that the benefits she derived from cohabiting outweighed those she might have enjoyed through marriage.

I want now to briefly return to Stephanie's reflections on the reproach that is meted out to unmarried mothers. In the extract that appears below Stephanie elaborates on this theme:

*Stephanie:* ...if I am not married I sort of feel more like a solo-mother than um—  
From other people's point of view I feel as though I am a solo-mother rather than, you know in a relationship or something, yeah.

*Stephanie:* Yeah. Yeah. And I have got another friend who is pregnant at the moment and she is sort of going through all the same things that I went through. She sort of feels as though, she is Maori, and she sort of feels as though people are sort of commenting that 'there is another young pregnant Maori.' And she is in a very stable relationship, but she is very conscious of the fact that she hasn't got rings on her fingers. And you do notice that people always check your fingers for rings, especially when you are pregnant.

*Vivienne:* So both of you have felt a little uncomfortable under that scrutiny?

*Stephanie:* Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. (short pause) You sort of don't want to get dumped in with Social Welfare statistics or anything like that. You know because sometimes that is how it feels.

Lacking the visible social markers of marriage, Stephanie believes others impose on her the much maligned identity of 'solo-mother'. Her inclusion within this category is unwelcomed and unwarranted given her relationship to Craig. This relationship places her in closer proximity to married women: she shares partnership, but not legal, status with them.

The stigma associated with being an unmarried single mother suggests that the concept of illegitimacy is still significant, despite that fact that it is no longer possible to be 'illegitimate' in a legal sense.<sup>11</sup> This argument is corroborated by the fact that the Statistics Department (NZ) still considers it necessary to record the number of ex-nuptial births (i.e. births outside of wedlock) that occur in New Zealand each year.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This point is also brought out in Jane's reflections on her pregnancy, pp. 237-9.

<sup>12</sup> In terms of this research it is interesting to note that once again a branch of the State categorises people according to formal marital status and not according to whether or not they are cohabiting. Thus births to couples who cohabit are included within the ex-nuptial count. Yet some of the 'married births' may be to women who are not cohabiting with 'husbands' or who are cohabiting with men who are not 'their husbands'.

## IV

The failure of disciplinary interventions to achieve compliance to social norms suggests that the panopticon as the model of disciplinary power is in need of some refinement. In my adapted version the cell occupants would be caught in a constant struggle with the overseer in the watchtower. Who was watching who, at which moment, and with what effect would be a matter to be investigated, not assumed. The modified panopticon would imagine resistance to the exercise of power involving people in a continual play of strategies which sometimes takes the form of apparent concessions. With respect to marriage resisting cohabitantes, this entails their strategic use of aspects of marital discourse to achieve specific goals.

For example, several cohabitantes evaded the normalising gaze of the marital panopticon, in certain situations, by resorting to the practice of 'passing' as married. One woman described the phenomenon in the following manner:

*Barbara:* ...On most occasions where I think it is more expedient to appear to be married I will just pretend, or wear a wedding ring, or act as if I am married.

*Vivienne:* You have a wedding ring?

*Barbara:* I do have a wedding ring that I wear. I don't have any scruples about it. I mean it is not a matter of principle for me. I don't insist on everybody knowing my true marital status. It doesn't bother me at all how they perceive it. And mostly I prefer to ignore that I am not.

*Vivienne:* ...So does that mean that sometimes people might describe you as Matthew's wife?

*Barbara:* Oh yes, quite often.

By appropriating several of the central symbols of marriage, the wedding ring and the identity of 'wife', Barbara actively encourages other people to interpret her relationship with Matthew as one of marriage. This assertion of a married self occurs contextually in response to her perception of the dis/advantages of

foregrounding her non-married identity. Barbara's strategy involves her in an act of accommodation that shields her from the operation of the disciplinary gaze, at the same time as it maintains the power of that gaze. Her projection of a marital self is, as she says, a deception that does not rule out her claim to a cohabitational self in other settings. Barbara selectively constructs herself as a 'married self' (and therefore respectable) and a 'self resisting marriage' (hence, she is 'Not a couple. Not committed'). Through this double construction, Barbara seeks to position herself as a powerful agent in relation both to Matthew, and Matthew's friends. The success of Barbara's strategy relies, to a certain extent, on Matthew's willing complicity with these shifts in identity.

Barbara's implementation of this strategy depends on her engagement with such culturally available distinctions as the notion of public and private selves, and authentic and unauthentic selves, in addition to the distinction between marriage and cohabitation, to enable her to manage which self she presents in which contexts. Barbara's contextual assertion of her various coupled selves is based on the privileging of one self (the cohabitational self) as her 'true' self and the other self (the marital self) as an 'artificial' and 'strategic' self. This construction of the subject draws on humanist discourse which conceptualises the self as being comprised of a timeless and authentic core that remains unaltered despite shifts in identity. From this perspective changes to one's identity, such as that of (temporarily) becoming 'a wife' or 'a husband', represent an artificial or social overlay that disguises the real authentic self. Once again marriage is established as an 'unauthentic' identity. This view of the subject supports the discursive construction of marriage as involving the imposition of socially prescribed roles, whereas cohabitation is seen as practice which provides a way of expressing an authentic self.

Paradoxically, while the strategy of passing relies on, and affirms, the distinction between cohabitation and marriage, it also contributes to the



confounding of these boundaries. If people who cohabit take on the symbols of marriage at the same time as married individuals refuse them, these symbols can no longer be taken as a reliable guide to a person's 'real' or legal marital status. It, therefore, becomes increasingly difficult to tell at a glance which heterosexual couples are married and which are not. As a result, the significance of making this distinction amongst heterosexual couples begins to diminish.

## V

The argument for sameness, and the consequent collapsing of the distinction between cohabitation and marriage, threatens to undercut the political potential of cohabitation as a challenge to dominant marital discourses. In altering the relationship between cohabitation and marriage from one characterised by opposition to one characterised by similarities, marriage is reinforced as the standard against which other forms of coupledness are evaluated. Cohabitation is assimilated into marital discourse, and constructed as a relationship that for all intents and purposes is governed by the same rules. We return, therefore, to the position of cohabitation as a *de facto* relationship, and any specificity that the cohabitational form offers is buried.

In other words, this strategy is still caught up in what has been called logocentrism or an 'economy of the same'. Within logocentric thought reality is apprehended through dualist categories that take the form of hierarchical pairs. One side of the dualism is defined as the standard or reference point, and all other positions are compared to the one in terms of their identity, opposition or complementarity with the one (Grosz 1989:105). Dualities function by demarcating a line of difference, investing that line with authority and treating the categories so

created in a unitary manner. Thus the differences within each category are rendered invisible (Scott 1988a:46).

The call for the recognition that cohabitation and marriage may both allow for the production of egalitarian relationships begins the process of breaking down the oppositional thinking that characterises disciplinary and resistance politics. It suggests that the line of difference between cohabitation and marriage, installed within both marital discourse and counter-discourse of marriage resistance, is an artificial construct. As such it poses a challenge to a discursive construction of cohabitation and marriage that imposes 'differences between', but does not acknowledge the existence of the 'differences within'. Deconstructing the oppositional pairing of marriage and cohabitation opens up possibilities for exercising greater choice. When marriage is not conceptualised as an inevitably oppressive practice, the option of marrying and retaining flexibility and autonomy becomes feasible. This point is taken up and elaborated on as I explore Olivia's story in Chapter six.

Given a less rigid view of cohabitation and marriage that allows for the multiple ways in which both relational forms might be lived, it becomes conceivable that couples who share a particular gender politics may have more in common regardless of their marital status than couples who share a marital status. A closer look at some marriages would no doubt demonstrate that women can maintain an independent identity and achieve freedom and equality within marriage. This suggests that marriage resisting cohabitees overestimate the significance of the institution of marriage (because they generally understand marriage in very traditional terms), and underestimate the ongoing impact of gender in shaping all heterosexual relations inside and outside of marriage (Jackson 1995b:18-23).

By directing the critical focus exclusively at marriage and the part this institution has played in the production of hierarchical gender relations, the

counter-discourse of marriage resistance deflects attention from the way in which gender operates to continue to shape cohabitantes' relationships. Within this construct the impact of social forces is confined to marriage itself while the dynamics of the cohabitational relationship are assumed to be authored by cohabitantes themselves. The dangers of this perspective are obvious. When the limits of cohabitation as a strategy of resistance to inequitable gender relations within long-term heterosexual relations are exposed, it is highly likely that this will be taken as an indicator of personal failings, rather than as an indicator of the difficulties of doing gender differently in the context of institutions like schools and workplaces which have incorporated gender differences into everyday organisational practice. The limitation of a critical perspective to marriage tends to truncate the parameters in which social change needs to occur and alienates potential allies — married women.

### MANAGING SELVES III: OPPOSING OPPOSITIONS

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This chapter revisits feminist analyses of marriage and contemplates some of the possibilities and limitations offered by cohabitation as a strategy for producing equitable heterosexual relations. It examines this issue through a detailed analysis of one woman's engagement with the discourses of cohabitation and marriage. At the outset of this discussion I want to raise two possibilities: firstly, that marriage is not inevitably disadvantageous for women; and secondly, that cohabitation is not necessarily an improvement, in feminist terms, on marriage. Debating this point challenges the tendency within some feminist explorations of marriage and heterosexuality to characterise these practices as irredeemably patriarchal (see for example, Rich 1980; Barrett & McIntosh 1982; Smart 1984; Delphy & Leonard 1992; Kitzinger, Wilkinson & Perkins 1992b). It also questions the notion, held by many of the cohabitees that I interviewed, that cohabitation is by definition liberatory. My intention, in pursuing this line of inquiry, is to 'destabilise' some of the meanings attributed to marriage and cohabitation in order to broaden the range of available options for women seeking egalitarian heterosexual relationships.

In adopting this stance, I have taken seriously Rosemary Pringle's warning against 'overstating the coherence and stability of men's power' (1995:207). Pringle's position is echoed in Wendy Hollway's (1993) response to 'Theorizing Heterosexuality', a special issue of the journal *Feminism and Psychology* (Kitzinger, Wilkinson & Perkins 1992a; see also Smart 1996b:166 & 175). Hollway states:

Heteropatriarchy is a more multiple and contradictory constellation than radical feminist analyses can handle. Within that constellation there are spaces in which some heterosexual couples (and some lesbian couples) have been able to provide good enough – never perfect – understanding, support, mutual pleasure and satisfaction of needs to constitute what I call love.

(Hollway 1993:415-6)

Robyn Rowland also argues for the existence of feminist heterosexual relations. On the basis of her relationship at that time, she asserts that it is possible to create intimate relationships with men that are not riddled with inequalities (1992:461). However, her particular version of feminist heterosexuality does not entail a recuperation of marriage (Rowland 1992:461). On the contrary, she explicitly disavows marriage and full-time cohabitation. For Rowland, the practice of a feminist heterosexuality is favoured by the receipt of separate incomes and the operation of separate households (1992:461). While the people I interviewed obviously break with Rowland's call for separate living arrangements by co-residing, they nonetheless pursue strategies which they hope will produce more egalitarian relationships. For example, many of them cohabited to symbolically mark their independent status, just as many also sought financial autonomy.

The material that forms the core of this paper is drawn from interviews that I carried out separately with a couple, Olivia and Steve, several months prior to their marriage. Olivia and Steve decided to get married after they had been living together for a period of five years. When they began living together neither was

particularly keen on the idea of marriage. In fact Olivia, recollecting the views that she held then, states that she explicitly rejected marriage. Steve could be described as being simply disinterested: marriage was an optional extra, so why bother?

My interest in interviewing Olivia and Steve lay with the opportunity they presented for tracing the motivations that might lie behind shifting discursive allegiances. Why would someone who was openly critical of marriage want to change her marital status? What might the answer to this question indicate about the limitations of cohabitation as a strategy geared to producing egalitarian relationships? What does Olivia's talk about her decision to marry suggest about the complexity of people's positionings within discourse and their ability to exercise agency through the reformulation of discourse according to their own preferences?

In this chapter, I continue to examine questions of agency and resistance. Olivia is involved in an active negotiation with the discursive meanings of both cohabitation and marriage: she utilises, embraces and resists these relational discourses. In moving to take up a position within marital discourse, she anticipates certain benefits: for example, an elevated status for her relationship within their respective families. Simultaneously, she rejects a straightforward acceptance of the traditional position offered to women within marriage: Olivia does not anticipate being Steve's (subordinate) wife, instead she will remain his 'partner'. Olivia conceives of her shifting locations as being comprised of the desirable elements of both discursive practices; she imagines that she will be able to enjoy the best of both worlds.

Olivia's strategic utilisation of the discourses of both marriage and cohabitation is indicative of the form of agency that I have been arguing for within this thesis. Agency entails the active reworking of how our subjectivities are constituted. It involves the stitching together of formerly discrete discursive elements in order to create new discourses that afford new subjectivities. Such

strategies are risky: they are frequently accompanied by unmet expectations and unforeseen pitfalls, as well as promised pleasures and satisfactions (Moore 1994:64-7). Furthermore, acts of agency always occur within social and familial contexts which establish the parameters within which we operate. The process of privileging certain subjectivities, discourses, and meanings over others conditions our access to subject positions and hence our ability to create our/selves in our own images. Therefore, agency should not be understood as the complete freedom to determine our own destinies – we are not that powerful – but rather as the exercise of choice in the midst of constraining influences (Davies 1991:46; Moore 1994:61). The postmodern subject is not the unfettered author of their own destiny, rather s/he is a storyteller who, in interacting with the very elements that constituted her, produces a pastiche, something that is uniquely her own creation, yet also recognisably of this time and place.

Olivia's decision to marry after embracing cohabitation as a form of feminist resistance could be interpreted as 'a change of heart'. My objection to this interpretation lies with its reductionism. It is possible through this lens to view Olivia solely as a compliant actor who uncritically engages in the conventions of marriage. While Olivia operates in the context of discourses of cohabitation and matrimony over which she has little control she is, nevertheless, actively involved in the reconstruction of what it means to get married. This reconstruction is based on Olivia's reapplication of the egalitarian/non-egalitarian pole to cohabitation and marriage which allows the repositioning of these relational forms side-by-side: marriage, as it is lived, can be egalitarian. At the same time, Olivia accepts the continued application of a line of distinction around the issue of closure and commitment such that she comes to desire marriage over cohabitation.

In the excerpts that follow, Maxine is the name I have used for Olivia's sister; Maxine's husband is called Terry; and Olivia's (and Maxine's) mother is referred to as Margaret.

## I

Olivia's initial reaction to the place of marriage in her own life was strongly influenced by the criticisms feminist theorists like de Beauvoir ([1949] 1972) and Firestone (1972) made of romantic love and marriage. These understandings are reflected in her views on the marriages of two highly significant women in her life, her mother and her sister. Margaret and Maxine's marriages act as exemplars of all that feminism has suggested is wrong with the institution.

In response to my questions about her perceptions of marriage, Olivia focuses on the consequences of treating marriage as the pinnacle of a romantic narrative:

*Olivia:* I suppose my most negative perception of marriage is that people go into it and they have only known each other for a little while. And they fall in love and it is all that lust stage and they get engaged and they get married. And it is wonderful and then they crack up. And it is like my sister, marriage is just so cool because it is a dress and it is cars and it has got little dolls in front. You know, it is the whole thing. They get into the hype rather than the actual, you know what it really is.

When marriage is treated as a romantic event, Olivia claims, its long-term significance is obscured and the oppressive repercussions of marriage for women are hidden behind a romantic veneer. As Olivia notes, viewing marriage in romantic terms encourages women, in particular, to focus heavily on the wedding



day, its 'trappings and frills', to the neglect of the 'realities' of the relationship which follows: love and romance in this scenario act as bait (Jackson 1993b:40, 1995b:50). The result, Olivia argues, are relationships that are founded on romantic dreams of happy-ever-after-endings. These romanticised versions of marriage lead women into the trap of perpetuating their own domination: they want to be brides, to celebrate their status as 'the loved one', thus they marry and accept the position of (subordinate) wife.

Steve also articulated a critical stance on the link between love and marriage. In the following statement he attempts to sever the connection:

*Steve:* ...I suppose I know she [Olivia] loves me and all that but I still don't think, you know just that, okay, that is no reason to get married, is it?

For both Olivia and Steve, love and marriage are discursively separated, thus marriage no longer forms the compulsory sequel to falling in love.

The situation for women is, as Olivia acknowledges, complex and contradictory. Marriage, especially the wedding ritual, plays into the gendered politics of appearance. As a bride a woman avails herself of an important cultural symbol of beauty, and is publicly heralded as one man's exclusive object of sexual desire. A wedding can act as a trophy, a badge of a woman's success in catching a man in the open marketplace of buyers and sellers of hearts and bodies. As such, marriage offers women an avenue through which they can acquire a positive identity and gain social status (Burns 1986:219; Jackson 1993a:205; Spender 1994:3), a status that is dependent on estimations of his desirability: Is he tall, dark and handsome? Is he successful in material terms? Of course, identity and status achieved in this manner is precarious; it relies on the continuation of the relationship, an undertaking that is especially problematic in an era in which the future of a relationship is dependent on that most fickle of emotions, love (Jackson 1993a:208).

Under these circumstances, securing the longevity of the relationship may be an important goal. One way in which this might be accomplished is through adherence to the construction of marriage as a lifetime contract. Olivia maintains that this is exactly the stance held by Maxine and Margaret. In their rendition of the marital script, marriage establishes a permanent bond between two people. Combined with a belief that a woman's identity and social standing are derived from marriage, this discourse elevates the significance of the marital relationship for women. Marriage, like romantic love, can be:

...linked to women's search for a positive identity, a sense of themselves as valued, in a society which undervalues and marginalises them.

(Jackson 1993a:205)

The coupled identity produced by marriage assumes utmost importance, while the value of being a single female is, paradoxically, undermined. Ranking identities in this manner creates a tendency to be highly committed to the survival of the relationship, because the cost of its dissolution is considered to be extremely high – a diminished sense of self-worth.

For Maxine, and her mother Margaret, one of the consequences of this positioning is a belief that a wife is better off staying with her husband even when he is violent, adulterous and uses the couple's meagre income selfishly:

*Olivia:* ...When Terry started having that affair I just said, 'Right get out. Leave him.' And um Mum's attitude and Maxine's attitude was, 'She can't be on her own.' It would be better to be with the husband and all that crap. ... It was more important for her to be married and be with him than actually what she was going through. It was always like, 'Of course you should stay together.'

*Vivienne:* Why was that?

*Olivia:* The whole idea was that they should stay together, that you should work at it. You know Mum would say, 'Oh you are just nothing on

your own.' But that is their attitude. You stick together. You cover up. Or you try to fix it. And you grin and bear it.

Olivia acknowledges that the alternatives for her sister, should Maxine end her marriage, are not very attractive:

*Olivia:* ...and she looked at leaving him, but the biggest fear she had was being a woman on her own with children and not having economic security, being on the DPB (Domestic Purposes Benefit). And I understand that. It is not easy.  
I think there is this attitude that it is better to be with a man when you have children. ... Marriage gives her status. I really believe that. It makes her, she is Mrs Stone and that is really important. Rather than being 'Jo solo-mother' on the DPB.

What is made evident by Olivia's discussion of Maxine's marital situation is Olivia's own perspectives on marriage. For instance, Olivia conceives of marriage as a conditional rather than permanent bond: there are circumstances that warrant separation and divorce. Olivia is also concerned about the power imbalances that are associated with economic dependence. And she is critical of attachment to the status of 'wife'. Yet, in spite of these reservations, Olivia intends to marry.

## II

Anxious to avoid replicating Maxine and Margaret's entrapment, Olivia initially rejects marriage in favour of living with her partner Steve. Although this option constitutes a break with the codes of convention upheld by her family, it allows Olivia to form a domestic relationship without encountering the anticipated drawbacks of becoming a 'wife':

*Olivia:* ...I suppose marriage to me then ... represented all the negative aspects, as in possession, ownership and the granting of women status that they couldn't get unless they were married. By not being married, it was the only way I could actually reject all those sort of ideas and myths about marriage.

But just as the position of her sister is complex and contradictory, so too is Olivia's. In this section I want to consider the ramifications of the various positions adopted by Olivia and Steve and examine what they have to say about how power comes to be distributed between them.

As Olivia narrates the story of how she and Steve came to move in together, Olivia stresses her uncertainty about taking this step — a step beyond that of mere co-residence to that of co-ownership:

*Vivienne:* Why did you actually end up living with Steve?

*Olivia:* ...Probably in the beginning, if I am perfectly honest, I felt that if I didn't live with him, I sort of got dragged along with it, that we would probably break up or something like that. It was the first time I had ever been in love with someone and it was pretty overwhelming. And he was sort of full on into it when I was just easing into it. And suddenly it was, 'Let's buy a house,' and stuff like that. So that is probably the gut reason, that I was scared of losing him. But I also wanted to. We were practically living together anyway. And we got on so well. He was a great mate and we just enjoyed being together. So it wasn't exactly scary. I didn't see living together as like a huge big deal. It wasn't like getting married.

Olivia constructs this moment in their relational history as one in which she is more susceptible than Steve to the collapse of their relationship. Steve's determination to acquire a house conveys to Olivia that the future of her relationship with him is conditional on her willingness to endorse his aspirations to purchase a house.

Were Olivia to refuse this invitation to join him in this project then she senses that their relationship would probably fold.

Respectively positioned as 'the wanted one' and 'the one who wants', Steve's pressure on Olivia to join him in the purchase of a house does not pose a threat to the relationship, rather it engenders compliance: Olivia is willing to concede to his preferences in order to sustain the relationship. While it might be tempting to view this aspect of Olivia and Steve's relationship idiosyncratically, Duncombe and Marsden suggest otherwise (1993, 1995a). In their sociological analysis of emotional intimacy within heterosexual couples, Duncombe and Marsden argue for the existence of a gendered pattern of pressure and concession within heterosexual relationships (1995a:158-60). In other words, a gendered pattern of differential attachment to the preservation of the relationship, as I suggested in the previous section, provides the basis for the formation of gendered power relations.

In spite of the pressure she experiences to join Steve in the purchase of a house, Olivia retains a view of herself as an active and freely determining subject. She counters a perception that she is somebody over whom Steve exercises power by noting her pleasure in her relationship with Steve, which by this stage closely resembled living together. Moving to align her previous living arrangement, 'flat swapping',<sup>1</sup> with that of living together, Olivia simultaneously diminishes the significance of their changed circumstances and also the significance of their move to buy a house together. Although this tactic preserves a sense of her own agency, it does so at the expense of being able to see the house as a statement of commitment to the relationship: 'it wasn't like getting married'.

Compared with Olivia's ambivalence, Steve's account conveys his determination that they should live together:

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<sup>1</sup> Flat swapping refers to the practice of staying overnight on a regular basis at each other's homes.

*Vivienne:* So you were 'flat swapping' for a while?

*Steve:* Yeah and then – I'd talked to many people over the previous year about getting Housing Corp. finance and stuff like that. And then I suggested to Olivia, 'would she be into it?' And it was more for, just as a business thing. We would buy a house as an investment, as much as anything. ... And then we saw this house. And although Olivia didn't really like it, I just thought it was the best thing we had seen, and 'Let's go for it.'

And she was really worried because she hadn't seen her parents or said anything about it. She had hardly told them anything about me let alone that we were going to move in together. But I just said, 'Yeah go for it. We can do it. If the worst comes to the worst we can sell it off and we will make a little bit on it.'

*Vivienne:* If it was primarily for investment why did you ask Olivia? I mean you would have had other friends?

*Steve:* Oh yeah. I thought, I was really happy in what we had as a relationship. And I wanted to have Olivia involved. And I thought it would be very good for us because the swapping back and forth was a hassle. And as to the financial point of view, it was much cheaper for us to have our own house and pay off a mortgage than get a flat together. So it made more sense that way, and just to test our relationship.

A straightforward interpretation of Steve's initiative is that the buying of the house is simply, as he claims, a financial investment. The house represents a business arrangement, and cannot be taken as a symbol of Steve's love or commitment to his relationship with Olivia. Yet it is also possible to read the joint purchase of the house as an emotional investment which operates to tie Olivia into the relationship by complicating the process of separation.

Herein lies a significant contradiction that underpins Olivia and Steve's relationship. Olivia expresses uncertainty about living together and purchasing a house. Her major concern is with the possibility that the relationship might end.

Fearing this scenario she compromises on the house question, and agrees to its purchase. Steve, on the other hand, does not display anxiety about Olivia's commitment to the relationship. Nor is he motivated to do what she wants in order to sustain the relationship. Yet it is Steve who moves to solidify their relationship through co-residence and co-ownership. He initiates the features of their relationship that are most 'marriage like'. It seems highly plausible, therefore, that Steve is very committed to his relationship with Olivia.

This reading is consistent with the argument advanced by Stanley and Markman (1992:595-6). As they point out, 'structural investments' like joint possessions act as constraining or stabilising forces within a relationship because they raise the costs attached to leaving the relationship. 'Structural investments' are not so much indicators of a committed relationship, but productive of commitment. 'Constraint commitment', as they call it, is contrasted with 'personal dedication' (Stanley & Markman 1992:596). This latter aspect of relational commitment is based on a desire to maintain the relationship for the pleasures and satisfactions the relationship brings (Stanley & Markman 1992:595-6).

Conscious of the power of jointly held possessions to cement relationships, some of the cohabitees with whom I spoke self-consciously minimised the extent to which they owned common property (for example Barbara, Rachel and Andrew), while others bought things together fully aware of the practical implications and the symbolic value of these commodities:

*Philip:* ...You see for some people if you love someone, if you fall in love you get married and have babies. I don't see it like that. Lisa and I fell in love so we started living together. Our lives became entwined that way. We started doing things together, we even buy things together.

In fact, Steve alerts us to the relational significance of the move to jointly buy the house when he describes it as 'a test of our relationship'. Yet, he

foregrounds the financial advantages of such a move and reassures himself that a possible sale of the house sometime in the future will generate a nett gain. Even if the relationship breaks down, the emotional consequences of this are offset by the financial benefits associated with home ownership.

More overtly invested in the relationship than in the house, Olivia's worries are not so easily appeased. Steve's initiative over the house does not furnish Olivia with a sense of relational security. This is partly because Steve talks about the purchase of the house almost entirely in financial terms. He draws on the persuasive powers of practical arguments to overcome Olivia's reservations about shifting in together and buying a house. Through the constitution of the purchase as a financial investment, rather than a symbol of emotional commitment, Steve strengthens his ties with Olivia without assuming a position of obvious emotional vulnerability. In so doing, Steve complies with the expectation that men will demonstrate relational connection through material means like financial support and property acquisition (Duncombe & Marsden 1995:242).

Because such instrumental acts are seldom read by women as acts of love, the emotionally detached character of Steve's position finds easy reinforcement (Cancian 1987:75-6; see also Duncombe & Marsden 1995a:155, 1995b:242). But Steve also works actively to enhance this perception of himself. He undercuts the likelihood of the house signifying an increased level of commitment to his relationship with Olivia by stressing how readily the house can be sold:

*Steve:* ...And okay if it [the relationship] did fall through we could always sell the house. That was always there and still always is. It is not a problem.

For Steve, ownership of the house is not something that would force them to stay together — the house is not a tie that binds. Steve thus contests the idea that property acts as a form of 'constraint commitment'.



Olivia also attempts to diminish the symbolic significance of their joint purchase. While her participation in the acquisition of a house symbolises her deepening commitment to the relationship's ongoing future, Steve's comments prevent her from interpreting his involvement in this light. Measured against the solemnity that Olivia attributes to marriage, the purchase of the house lacks symbolic significance; it is not a big deal, not like marriage. Because the house can be readily sold Steve publicly defines its purchase as of little import. Thus, for vastly different reasons, both of them produced talk in their interviews which down played the emotional significance of their joint purchase of a house. The house does not overtly function as either a statement of their love for each other, nor of their mutual commitment to their relationship.

The joint purchase of the house, in this context, is insufficient to counter Olivia's fear that her relationship with Steve might collapse. It is a fear that is particularly resonant for Olivia. Comments about her lack of trust in men, her vulnerability, her sense of the possibilities 'that something would go wrong' between Steve and herself emerged a number of times in interviews conducted on two separate occasions. This fear forms the basis of her need to conform to Steve's desires and it affords Steve a position from which he is able to exercise power. It is a feature of their relationship that Olivia explicitly acknowledges in the following quote:

*Olivia:* I always felt that he was more powerful than me. It was like with the house, I felt that he would go, that we would break up if we didn't get the house because it was so important to him.

And his attitude always is - I say, 'I hate you. I hate you. I am going to leave.' And he will say, 'Fine. Go.' And he won't want me to go, because he knows that I won't. Although one day he may be shocked. But he will just say, 'Go then if you don't like it. I like it. I am happy here.' And that always shuts you up.

By refusing to play the part that Olivia offers him, Steve resists Olivia's attempts to get him to join her in openly expressing vulnerability. Through the subject position of emotional remoteness and invincibility Steve confirms his position in the relationship as the least interested party (see Duncombe & Marsden 1993:236, 1995a:160). This contributes to Olivia's sense of her relative powerlessness.

This disparity in power was played out in a very painful episode when Olivia became pregnant, and she and Steve had to confront the issue of whether or not Olivia would have an abortion. In the following lengthy extract Olivia discusses Steve's response to an unplanned pregnancy, a response which illustrates his power in their relationship:

*Olivia:* ...when I said I was pregnant the first thing he said was, 'At least we know we can have children.' I mean there was absolutely no way he would consider having it. And even though we talked about it, it seemed to me to be this real thing, 'Oh well, at least we can have children, but there is no way it will happen now.'

And there was heaps of pressure on with that. (five sentences later...)

But you see power again came into it. Because I felt that if I had that child and he didn't want it then I would be the one left with it.

(ten sentences later ...)

The hospital that morning, when I went for the abortion, he just dropped me off in the car and said, 'Look I will pick you up later.'

And he just couldn't handle it. He can't stand hospitals. And then I woke up, and everyone else had people there, and he just didn't come until he rang the nurse. And I had been awake for ages.

And then he picked me up and he hadn't bought me anything. No flowers or anything like that. And I said, 'Jesus you didn't even buy me anything.' He said, 'I am going to. I have been so busy.' And I got really fucked off because that is the way I always feel, that the rest of his life is so much more important. He couldn't leave work for me.

Later, as she continued to reflect on this time in their relationship, Olivia stated:

But that is Steve. Steve is emotionally like an iceberg. He just does what he wants and gets what he wants, sort of thing. And either I follow along or I don't.

But you see I now feel more secure in that I suppose I know him better. I know not to expect anything. I've got to really work on him to make him realise how important it is for me and to be that supportive.

And that is why I feel he has more power in a way. Because things like that affect me much more than him. And he can always walk away. Whether he wants to or not, but I always feel he can.

Once again Olivia constructs her understanding of the dynamics of their relationship in terms of an asymmetrical willingness to abandon the relationship if circumstances do not remain favourable. In this context her opposition to his wishes is a risky practice: it could precipitate the demise of the relationship.

### III

For hundreds of years, women have practised the virtues of wifeliness. For the last twenty, many of them have decided to give it all a miss. They'll keep the wedding — which promises radiance and romance and puts a *woman* first — but the self-sacrifice which goes with being a wife is no longer seen as glamorous, satisfying, or even dignified.

(Spender 1994:7)

Since she and Steve purchased a house nearly five years ago, Olivia's stance on marriage has shifted. She has become more convinced about the benefits that marriage might offer her. However, Olivia's willingness to get married does not represent an unquestioning acceptance of conventional marital discourse. Rather, she endeavours to stitch together a refashioned discourse on marriage with

elements derived from both cohabitational and conventional marital discourse. Olivia believes the new style of marriage created by this discursive reconstruction does not inevitably lead to oppressive relationships for women. Marriage, thus redefined, promises to remove some of the vagaries of living together, while not replicating the inequities Olivia identified in Margaret and Maxine's marriages.

The option of getting married is opened up for Olivia when she observes marriages which conform to her ideas about relationships between cohabiting couples:

*Olivia:* ...I've met some people that I just haven't known are married. And I've known them for a while and then you find out that they are married and you think, 'Well!' And it is really good. Like it is no big deal because you actually know that they are sussed and you know that it isn't really going to change.  
...I think marriage isn't important as *marriage*. It is the way you are together.

In the light of this knowledge, Olivia, revises her earlier view that marriage entailed inequality. She begins to consider that inequalities between women and men are not inherent in marriage as such, but are the result of aspects of heterosexual coupledness, married or cohabiting. Thinking along these lines deconstructs the opposition between marriage and cohabitation that previously rendered marriage an impossibility for Olivia. As a result, marriage loses its relevance as an impediment to egalitarian relationships.

When the opposition between marriage and cohabitation is dismantled, the risks associated with getting married diminish. It becomes possible for Olivia to envisage being married, while retaining the things that she likes about her relationship with Steve. No longer does marriage inevitably lead to unwelcome changes in their relationship, nor does it pose a threat to the good things they have already established between them:

*Olivia:* ...You said something about how is living together different from marriage. And it is a really fine line ... I do think in a way they are exactly the same. Our relationship won't change. It won't make me love him more. It won't make us stay together longer. It won't do any of that stuff.

Steve also wants their relationship to carry on in much the same vein after they are married:

*Steve:* ...I don't see that I should be any different, or that Olivia should be any different towards me, or me to her, just because we have been married. Like what we have, what we have been doing is obviously working fairly well. Okay, it has its ups and downs, but that is to be understood. I don't think it should change. I don't think it will change.

The notion that his relationship with Olivia shouldn't change after their marriage is reflected in Steve's intention to continue to use 'partner' as a form of description. Incorporating this element of cohabitational discourse into marital discourse acts as a marker of his wish to preserve the character of their relationship.

Olivia's decision to marry does not entail conformity to some of the conventions associated with marriage. She expects to maintain her resistance to the language of 'wife' and 'husband' as she continues to embrace 'partnership':

*Vivienne:* When you get married next year do you think you will still use the word 'partner'?

*Olivia:* Definitely. I am not his wife. I won't be his wife. No I couldn't refer to him as my husband. It is just a term I don't find comfortable. I don't like it. ... I don't see that marriage is going to change the way we are. We are partners now. It isn't going to change anything. I won't be Mrs Walsh. I am Ms and I will always stay Ms. Partner is a term that I like. I think it suits us really well. And it won't change.

The refusal of the position of 'wife' forms a crucial aspect of the new marital discourse (Spender 1994:7; VanEvery 1995a:262, 1995b:21). It is the identity of 'wife', somebody who stands in the shadow of the man she married, who undertakes the responsibility for doing the 'wifey bits' that renders marriage so problematic for many of the women in this study who chose to cohabit rather than marry.<sup>2</sup> The outcome of constructing herself as a 'partner' rather than a 'wife' is that Olivia retains a sense of herself as an autonomous person, a person who both shares the responsibility for doing the housework, and manages her own financial resources. Olivia's position can be read as a form of ongoing resistance to the gendered conventions of traditional marital discourse, while she utilises the ritual of marriage ceremony to achieve public recognition of her relationship with Steve.

In keeping with her desire to be identified as a 'partner' and not Steve's 'wife', Olivia anticipates her refusal of some of the social markers that are typically associated with a change in marital status for women.<sup>3</sup> She does not imagine accepting the title 'Mrs': she sees this as a way to continue to announce that she is her own woman and not Steve's possession. However, Olivia does contemplate adopting Steve's surname, a question that did not arise while she and Steve were living together. Although this might seem to be an act of compliance, Olivia's personal history renders this action more complex:

*Olivia:* ...I am still debating about whether to change my name or not. You see I don't like the name Steele. I was going to change it just before Dad died, but I thought it was quite a negative thing to do after that. And I actually quite like the idea of changing my name. I have no affiliation to the name Steele. It is not my name. My name is Rivers by birth right. That is my name, and yet I am not going to take that. I mean Olivia Rivers is a bit silly.

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter four (pp. 75-6) for a full discussion of this point.

<sup>3</sup> VanEvery noted a similar phenomenon amongst some of the married women in her study of 'non-sexist' households (1995a:262, 1995b:21; see also Spender 1994:16-7)

Having been adopted, Olivia has two surnames available to her, the name of her adoptive father and the name of her birth mother. Her adoption has involved both the application and the breach of patrilineal social customs which influence naming practices in families. Olivia's pre-marital surname does not reflect her biological paternity. Rather, it follows the conventional practice for adopted children: Olivia's surname is that of her adoptive father's. This surname fulfils the social expectations pertaining to adoption even as it defies the idea that surnames indicate connections established through birth, or for women by marriage. Severed from her birth name and the statement it makes about her identity, Olivia feels ambivalent about her pre-marital surname — it is not 'hers'. Prompted by this ambivalence she considers changing her surname. Prior to their decision to get married, Olivia entertained the notion of taking her adopted mother's birth name as her own, yet later abandoned this plan in favour of Steve's surname. Moving to acquire Steve's name offers Olivia a readily accessible and accepted mechanism for changing her surname that mitigates the complexity of her naming that arises out of her adoption. While Olivia's reasons for making this decision are complex, her actions nevertheless uphold the convention that women take on their husband's name on marriage. In this scenario, her insistence on 'Ms' rather than 'Mrs' becomes the key symbol of her rejection of the naming conventions associated with marriage.

Reaching the conclusion that marriage does not inevitably jeopardise her identity as a 'partner' and autonomous woman, Olivia can begin to contemplate the benefits that she might derive from marrying Steve. In discussing her decision, Olivia seeks to confine the meaning of her action to its celebratory aspects. For her marriage 'is just a fun way for my family and I to celebrate our relationship'. As a celebratory event marriage is a recognised form of closure to the romantic narrative (Jackson 1993b:49; Stacey & Pearce 1995:16 & 18). In this capacity, marriage is the ultimate symbol of romantic love, a way of making public a preferential attachment

to one person to the exclusion of all others (Burns 1986:216; Jackson 1993a:210, 1993b:43). Steve articulates the social significance of marriage in this way:

*Steve:* ...it is sort of like a public announcement I guess of both mine and Olivia's sort of partnership, and the sharing of our lives, and that we are going to spend our lives with each other. We sort of, you know, I guess, on and off we have decided that is probably what is going to happen now anyway. I guess to reaffirm, I guess.

When this ritualised form of symbolic closure is missing, as is the case for cohabitees, the narrative can appear open to other possible endings: the pursuit of new romantic encounters, for instance. To offset the uncertainty Olivia has felt about the place she occupies in Steve's life, Olivia seeks confirmation of her value to him through his desire to marry her, even as she remains critical of marriage:

*Olivia:* ...I didn't want to get married but there is also in your mind, you don't want them not to want to marry you because it is like that rejection thing.

*Vivienne:* It is a paradox isn't it?

*Olivia:* Yeah it is. It is a Catch 22. I don't really want to, but I want him to say 'Yes' so that I know that he wants me.

As Olivia indicates on several occasions in the interviews, Steve's power is located in his apparent indifference to the possibility that their relationship might end. Extracting Steve's commitment to marry acts as a counterweight to his indifference in other contexts.

The wedding is a celebration of their relationship, but it is also linked to an increased sense of security for Olivia:

*Olivia:* ...Maybe it [marriage] is a security thing too. Maybe it makes me feel more secure. But then I already feel secure.



This state contrasts with earlier periods in their relationship when, as Olivia recollects, she used to feel insecure and vulnerable. A product of Olivia's insecurity was her reticence about important relational issues, such as whether or not she should pursue her pregnancy to full-term and have a child. In speaking openly about her desire for children Olivia felt she risked rejection or being perceived as 'the pushy woman':

*Olivia:* ...Like before I would never talk about things like having children. I want to have children and will have children. But it was something I didn't ever want to say because I don't want him to reject it. Because saying, 'No. I don't want children,' is like saying, 'No. I don't want you to have my children.' So I didn't want to be put in that position. And I didn't want to make it like I was being the pushy woman.

As I have noted several times during this chapter, Steve's actual or threatened rejection of Olivia operates to position her less powerfully with respect to him. Fearing his lack of commitment to her, Olivia monitors her own behaviour: she does not avail herself of the position of the 'pushy woman' in case this precipitates his withdrawal from their relationship.

Corresponding to her increased sense of security Olivia notes that she has become more outspoken. While at other points in the interview Olivia links her enhanced security with marriage, in the following extract she attributes the cause of her changing level of security to the impact of the duration of their relationship, denying that their impending marriage has had any effect:

*Olivia:* ...I feel more secure. And it is not because we are getting married, because I have felt that it has been getting better each year. And it is a time thing I am sure. I don't think getting married will make it any better. I think it is just getting to know someone and trusting them. You know, building up a trust. But I know certainly if I had got married a year after I had met him I wouldn't feel like this. There is no way. It just comes from time.

In contrast to Olivia's emphasis on time as a source of security in her relationship with Steve, I would like to suggest that both the length of time that Olivia and Steve have been together, and the upcoming marriage are important to Olivia's repositioning. As time passes, and Olivia is still with Steve, Olivia's sense that the relationship will endure, despite the difficulties they have encountered, reduces her sense of vulnerability. Olivia feels that she has come to a point of knowing Steve, and from this position of knowing can trust him sufficiently to reveal more of her controversial wishes and needs, including her wish to be married, without fearing that the relationship will be over.

Olivia first raised the possibility that they might marry about a year prior to their decision to actually proceed with a wedding. Her original suggestion followed her abortion by a few months. Parental pressure, especially from his side, was one of the motivating factors behind her changing position on marriage:

*Olivia:* ...we were getting some pressure from his parents. They kept on making comments and things. Not real pressure, but just little comments. Like, 'Thou shalt not have children unless thou art married,' and stuff like that.

Although Olivia does not discuss the effect of these comments on her, against the background of her unplanned pregnancy, and her misgivings about the abortion, it is hard to imagine that such comments were easily deflected. Steve, however, seems more impervious to his parents' attempts to influence their lives. Responding to my promptings on the issue of family pressure he replied, '[It was] mainly on her. There was none on me'.

Steve initially 'brushed off' Olivia's first marriage proposal:

*Steve:* The initial reaction would have been, 'Why?' 'What is the use?' 'What is in it?' And stuff like that.

By reacting in this manner Steve underscores his emotional insularity as he once more refuses to provide Olivia with the confirmation she seeks; she does not hear the desired message of 'I want you'. Tantamount to a personal rejection, Steve's refusal to marry Olivia does not intervene in the construction of their relationship as one of asymmetrical attachment. Preserved in the position of 'the one who wants', the effect of time in establishing Olivia's sense of trust and security seems limited. Although time ameliorates the impact of this dynamic, in-and-of-itself the longevity of the relationship is not sufficient to cause its disruption.

Such a disruption is brought about by Steve's acquiescence to Olivia's second marriage proposal. Once again Olivia flouts the gendered conventions of romance by positioning herself as the initiator. By taking on one of the acts that is perhaps most reserved for men, the proposal, Olivia actively challenges the highly gendered script of romance, while at the same time as she makes what might seem a compliant step. Uncomfortable with relinquishing the role of initiator to Olivia, Steve attempts to reposition himself as the active instigator by restaging the proposal, complete with all the romantic trimmings, at a later date:

- Steve:* ... and then when I got back from Australia I sort of proposed to her and got her a red rose and did all that. ...
- Vivienne:* So you hadn't agreed?
- Steve:* Oh yeah I had. But I still thought I would ask her.

With Steve's agreement to their marriage Olivia is presented with a statement of his exclusive love for her, his willingness to acknowledge their 'partnership', and an overt commitment that they will 'spend their lives with each other'. The potency of this act is amplified by what will be the public nature of its performance: their families and friends will bear witness to their exchange of 'vows'. By moving to close through marriage, at least temporarily, the question of whether they have a future together as intimate partners, Olivia counters Steve's

strategy of detachment by placing him in a position of accepting or rejecting the opportunity to engage in a public statement of their relationship. While she initiates the discussion of marriage, Steve uses the conventions of 'the proposal' to counter the construction of their marriage as something generated entirely by Olivia. Both Olivia and Steve break the conventions of marriage and romantic love in their attempts to consolidate their power vis à vis each other.

#### IV

Olivia's story illustrates some of the complexity of the negotiations that can take place within the field of heterosexual coupledness. Olivia situates and resituates herself in relation to cohabitation and marriage as she confronts the various and shifting significations attributed to each of these relational forms by herself, Steve and their respective families.

Olivia embraces the egalitarianism of cohabitation symbolised through the construct 'partner'. Yet she is also uneasy about the way in which her family and Steve's family resist the discourse of cohabitation. Their differing understandings of the meaning of cohabitation is elaborated through a contest over descriptive titles:

*Vivienne:* Do you use partner in all sorts of situations? With your friends? And with your family as well?

*Olivia:* Yep. Yep. Steve's family are a bit different. My family call us 'partners'. ... But yeah, his family call me 'Steve's girlfriend'.

*Vivienne:* What don't you like about 'girlfriend'?

*Olivia:* ...I suppose my relationship isn't what, I view 'girlfriend' as someone you go out with occasionally. I don't see it as something permanent and totally committed. And I think that is something less than what I feel our relationship is.

Their families' resistance to cohabitation as a committed relationship is confirmed by the way Olivia and Steve's decision to marry was greeted:

- Olivia:* ...It was like his grandma said to me, 'I am so pleased you are going to be my real grand-daughter.' And I thought, 'God yeah, before our engagement I would never have been your grand-daughter.'  
And my family are the same. They think that marriage means that you won't go away, that you won't break up. Which is quite bizarre. You know it is like he is really part of our family now.
- Vivienne:* Is it like you cross some kind of invisible boundary and something happens when you marry?
- Olivia:* Yeah, it is like, instead of being just a coloured in shadow you actually are in full-colour. ... I don't know why. I mean we have been together five years. It is not much shorter than my sister has been married. And they have already threatened to break up three or four bloody times.

The narration Olivia supplies of her shifting discursive location points to the deficiencies of cohabitational discourse. Some of these deficiencies arise from its marginalised status within the discursive field of heterosexual relationships. Although the practice of living together is tolerated, it continues to be positioned hierarchically with respect to marriage. Olivia objects to the repercussions of this hierarchal ordering. In particular, she takes issue with the lack of recognition afforded to her relationship with Steve by each of their families.

Against the background of this familial pressure Olivia strategically adopts a position within marital discourse. Although the consequences of how she is positioned by Steve, and Steve's family, are critical, these factors do not determine the nature of her decision. She is not the hapless quarry of power. Olivia draws on the normative power of marital discourse and her experience of family pressure to enable her to exercise power over Steve. In other words, the very things that encourage the constitution of her subjectivity within marital discourse become the

tools that provide her with sufficient leverage to gain Steve's consent to her proposal of marriage.

This is not to say that in exercising agency Olivia is not constrained by the effects of power relations and by conventional discourses on marriage. Clearly she is. Instead, I want to emphasise the contradictory nature of her positioning within the field of relations that form her everyday world. Olivia is not the victim of discourses, rather she is a strategic user of egalitarian aspects of cohabitation and the legitimacy and security of marital discourse. Olivia both acts and is acted upon. She is sub/ject to exercises of power, but she also exercises power.

## MANAGING MONEY: A RISKY BUSINESS?

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Women's economic dependence upon men has traditionally been regarded by feminists as a major obstacle to their equality and freedom.

(Briar 1992:41)

This chapter pursues the theme of identity construction by heterosexual women who cohabit with their partners. Specifically, I want to address the issues that are raised by a focus on the economic identities assumed by some of the women I interviewed and the implications of these identities for how power is exercised in their relationships. In pursuing this line of inquiry I once again address the question of agency, conceptualised throughout this thesis as the active engagement with, and strategic use of discursive resources.

My approach to these concerns makes use of the detailed analyses of people's talk. In the context of this chapter, I am interested in the talk of people who deliberately disrupt the assumptions, both past and present, that govern the monetary practices of heterosexual couples (especially married couples). The particular focus is on practices of money management that resist assumptions

about women's financial dependence. Couples, both married and unmarried, use a variety of allocative systems to avoid the negative repercussions of one partner's dependence on the other for money. For example, they may split a single income or pay money into a joint account. Regardless of the allocative system used, however, couples in long-term heterosexual relationships are assumed to share financial resources. It is this assumption that informs state policy with respect to income support for heterosexual couples. Sharing financial resources is normatively associated with marriage (Vogler & Pahl 1994:280). This gives rise to the characteristics associated with what Singh and Lindsay refer to as 'marriage money' (1996:58-61). 'Marriage money' is discursively defined as being joint, co-operative and nebulous (Singh & Lindsay 1996:58-61). Ideally, its distribution should be unaffected by issues of source, access, or control (Singh & Lindsay 1996:60).

Contemporary researchers like Pahl (1989, 1990) have interrogated the presumption that sharing occurs, pointing out that the ethos of sharing often operates to mask inequalities in access and control over money within marriage (see also Fleming & Easting 1994; Vogler & Pahl 1994; Singh & Lindsay 1996). Having produced typologies of the various allocative systems in use, many of these writers have turned their attention to the impact that questions of source, access and control have on equitable sharing. They note that the allocative system adopted by couples can serve to reinforce or undermine the effects of relations of financial dependency (Pahl 1989, 1990; Fleming & Easting 1994).

The allowance system, for example, highlights financial dependency through its reliance on the allocation of a set amount of money to a wife from her husband's income. Not only does this process emphasise that the work a wife does at home is unpaid, it also means that a wife's access to financial resources is mediated through her husband. In contrast, pooling systems make use of joint accounts to symbolise the disavowal of personal ownership of money and relations



of financial dependency. For couples who pool, money is usually seen to belong to both of them irrespective of its source. Thus, each person usually has direct access to the couple's collective funds.

The existence of several divergent money management practices indicates that money management is a site of discursive contest. At stake is the meaning attributed to money, the economic identities on offer, and subsequently the impact of these discursive constructions on relational dynamics. For instance, men have often been able to exercise power within marriage (and other heterosexual relationships) through the allowance system which distinguishes between 'earner' and 'non-earner' such that the earner is considered to be the 'true' owner of that resource, and therefore the person most entitled to determine how it is utilised (Blumstein & Schwartz 1983:56-8; Okin 1989:141; Morris 1993:529).

The selection of a discourse to govern the money management practices of a couple is not a guarantee of incumbency. The circulation of other discourses raises the possibility of conflict, contradiction, and shifts in discursive allegiance over time. Fleming and Easting noted that vestigial beliefs in the precedence of the earner were evident in the talk of couples who pooled their money (1994:89-90 & 132-3). The tension created by these conflicting tenets expressed itself as a reluctance on behalf of non-earning (usually female) partners to spend on personal items (Fleming & Easting 1994:89-90 & 132-3; see also Barrett & McIntosh 1982:69; Burgoyne 1990:654-5).

This chapter contributes to the discursive debate about allocative systems, focusing in particular on the use of emergent practices like that of independent money management. It examines the pleasures and satisfactions sought through this practice, and assesses the outcomes of this practice. The importance of this work lies in its explication of the avenues for the ongoing exercise of power through allocative systems designed to produce equality and autonomy.

The cohabitees with whom I spoke generally used one of two systems of allocation: independent money management (IMM), or joint money management (JMM). My discussion of the latter system will be brief. The use of joint money management (or pooling systems) has become highly prevalent amongst married couples. In a New Zealand study some form of pooling was in use by just over 60% of the sample (Fleming & Easting 1994:44). The high rate of uptake of this system has meant that it has received considerable attention (see Fleming & Easting 1994:44; and also Pahl 1989, 1990; Burgoyne 1990; Vogler & Pahl 1994). Given that much of what was said to me replicates this material, my discussion will be confined to those aspects of cohabitees' talk that deliberately constructs them as resistant actors who strive to retain a sense of themselves as unconventional.

In contrast to the wealth of material on the practice of pooling, the available literature on independent money management is sparse. This chapter concentrates on the issues that arise from a critical focus on IMM. What identities does it make available, to whom and with what effects? I have a personal interest in pursuing this tack. IMM was the money system that my former partner and I used. I am, therefore, highly familiar with some of its seductions, intricacies, and frustrations.

Personal reasons aside, the practice of IMM, with the exception of three recently published pieces, has been ignored by sociologists (see Fleming & Easting 1994; VanEvery 1995b; Singh & Lindsay 1996). The most frequent rationale for this omission is the low number of couples using this system in the research samples concerned (Pahl 1989; Vogler & Pahl 1994).<sup>1</sup> However, in a recently conducted study in New Zealand 13.5% of the 59 Pakeha couples who participated used IMM (Fleming & Easting 1994:44). While this figure, given the small sample size, cannot be taken to indicate the prevalence of IMM nation-wide it may nevertheless reflect a geographical variation in money management styles. Or it may be that the

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<sup>1</sup> Both of these articles are the outcome of research in England amongst couples who were by and large married.

practice of IMM is becoming increasingly popular, perhaps because of its resemblance to the financial practices of many flatting households.

Alternatively, it is possible that IMM is closely associated with cohabitation. Glezer and Mills found that 52% of those who cohabited used IMM in comparison with a usage of 23% by married couples (1991:35). A similar incidence amongst the cohabitees in her research was noted by Pahl (1989:74 & 106-7). If this is the case I would expect, in a sample comprised entirely of cohabitees, to find IMM occurring more frequently than in studies comprised largely of married couples. Indeed Singh and Lindsay have gone so far as to argue that cohabitees have a distinctive style of money management — 'cohabitation money' — that contrasts markedly with 'marriage money' (1996:58 & 61-2).<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of the level of its popularity, I would argue that it is time that IMM is subjected to interrogation. IMM is heralded as a solution to the problem of economic dependency for women within coupled relationships, yet sometimes the solutions to unequal arrangements are themselves fraught with hidden pitfalls. Does the pursuit of independence through IMM facilitate the establishment of egalitarian heterosexual relationships? Or does it, in certain circumstances, allow for the continued exercise of power within heterosexual relationships, albeit in slightly different ways?

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<sup>2</sup> Some of the points I raise in the course of my discussion may be pertinent to the issues that arise from the use of this practice by lesbians and gays, however, research into the financial practices of this group of people is urgently needed. A recent data base search indicated the paucity of material on this matter. For discussions of some relevance see: Steinman 1990; Berger 1990; Lynch and Reilly 1986; Schneider, 1986.

# I

The use of joint money management (JMM) by some of the cohabitees with whom I spoke can be read as an act of compliance to the dictate that couples share. Sharing financial resources, as I have already noted, is integral to the construction of married couples as economic units. By adopting a system of joint money these cohabitees engage in practices that more closely resemble the practices that characterise many marriages, rather than those of flatting households. In this they defy the schema proposed by Singh and Lindsay (1996:58-9). They are cohabitees who engage in 'marriage money' rather than 'cohabitation money'.

Symbolic of togetherness, joint money management may also indicate a belief in the longevity of the relationship. Arguably, the choice of a system of allocation reflects the level of commitment that exists between members of a couple (Duncombe & Marsden 1993:225 & 227; see also Fleming & Easting 1994:63). Certainly, the use of JMM was highest amongst those cohabitees in my research who had children. But joint money did not seem to be causally linked with the presence of children. The majority initiated JMM, many years previously, when they moved in together. Only one couple, Paula and Jonathan, made a change from independent money to joint money management when they became parents. My discussion of JMM focuses on what Paula and Jonathan had to say about the context in which they started to use this form of income pooling.

Confronted with the question of how to organise their finances when Paula left paid employment during her first pregnancy, Paula and Jonathan settled on JMM. In the following quote Paula explicitly cites the importance of equality in making this choice:

*Vivienne:* You told me last time when you left work that you and Jonathan decided to have a joint bank account. Why did you opt for that rather

than Jonathan paying half into your existing bank account, because that was another option wasn't it?

*Paula:* Yeah. Well it just sort of seemed like a bit of a hassle for him to get an automatic payment to transfer it. And it also seemed in a way that he was giving me money. Like giving me housekeeping which was–

*Vivienne:* If he paid half into your account?

*Paula:* Yeah. I would be limited by the amount that he gave me or decided to give me. Whereas if we have a joint account it is more an equal thing. Like I can take what I want from it for whatever I want. And I don't have the limitation of, 'Oh he has only given me two hundred dollars this week,' or whatever.

While Paula stresses equality, Jonathan's discussion of their decision emphasises the concept of partnership (see Pahl 1989:72; VanEvery 1995b:113). It is through this construct that the money he earns is rendered a collective item.

*Jonathan:* ...To start with Paula was really uncomfortable with the idea. ... She didn't like the idea of being supported by someone. But my reply is to say that it is not like that though because it is sort of like a partnership thing where I have one task and she has another. Like mine might be to earn money today and hers might be to keep things ticking over or to look after Dot [their two year old daughter]. And maybe in a few years time I will be doing what she is doing and she will be working. And if you average it out in the long term we are both contributing exactly the same. It is just that one of us is seen to be the breadwinner at any point in time, but that doesn't mean that either one of us is the parasite and the other is the host or whatever.

Framed in terms of equal partnership, JMM contests the pre-eminence of the earner (Fleming & Easting 1994:13 & 59; VanEvery 1995b:114). It is a strategy that deliberately sets aside the entitlement rights conferred by engaging in paid work within the public sphere in favour of the rights of both partners to have

access to money irrespective of their monetary contributions to the joint pool. Michele spoke about the switch she and Tim made from separate to joint money in the following manner:

*Michele:* ...In the old days Tim would earn the money, and I was the student so obviously I had very little, and I would spend his money. There was that power thing where, 'I have the money and I will make the final decision,' kind of thing. It was subtly there and I used to get really riled about it because I was doing just as much. It was supposed to be an equal relationship.

And I think that is probably why we have a joint account, just to say that things are equal. It doesn't matter who earns the money the other person is doing a lot too.

Michele's comments suggest, as do Jonathan's, that the issue of equality within JMM is broader than a simple question of equitable access to money. The practice of JMM is actively deployed in order to symbolise the attachment of equal value to the activities partners are engaged in, regardless of whether they receive income from these activities or not.

The use of JMM by many of the cohabitees with whom I spoke was also a statement about the shared distribution of paid employment. For some this criterion was met by both partners engaging in part-time employment, that in several cases augmented the unemployment benefit (Karen and David, and Chris and Duncan). For others this notion meant that paid work was a reciprocal activity. Thus an individual's responsibility to undertake work for money could be fulfilled by currently being the major earner (Michele and Jonathan), through past periods of earning for two (Jane and Rebecca), or displaced onto the future through an intention to take on this role at a later date (Paula).

This feature of the way that joint money is constructed by the cohabitees with whom I spoke is crucial to countering a view of themselves as conventional actors. Through the shared apportionment of paid work the relationship of

masculinity to financial and material provisioning is contested. For most of them decisions about who engaged in paid work, at any time, did not reflect gendered precepts but practical considerations. In this context appearances can be deceptive. A conventional gendered division of labour may be the result of thinking pragmatically, as Jonathan explains:

*Jonathan:* ...And it is funny for two people who are both, I guess we are pretty unorthodox in our outlook. I mean the things that we want and the values that we have are very similar and are both pretty much out of the mainstream. And yet we have ended up with a very orthodox relationship. I mean I go out and work nine-to-five and bring home the money and Paula buys the groceries and looks after Dot. I mean that is your basic marriage, you know definitely.

*Vivienne:* Why has it ended up like that, do you think?

*Jonathan:* Just practicality you know. For a start I had to work last year to get registered as an architect. At the end of my degree I was a graduate architect, but it is worthless until you are registered. You can't do anything with it. So I figured the sooner I do that the better. And then there was the baby. I mean Paula was breast feeding. I mean both of us had the feeling that Dot was our daughter and we would like to look after her as much as we could and not stick her in a crèche. And we weren't earning such good money that we could afford one anyway. Because I mean if you are not earning big dollars then putting your kid in a crèche, you know you only just make it past break even and you might as well stay at home and enjoy your child and just not have money. And just a whole lot of things sort of accumulated and it was just the logical choice was for me to work and Paula to stay with Dot. I mean it was just the only thing to do.

In spite of the emphasis on joint partnership, problems associated with being a non-earner can still surface for cohabitees using JMM. As other researchers

have observed, the effects of financial dependency tend to be most noticeable within the realm of personal spending (Pahl 1989:150, 1990:133; Burgoyne 1990: 654-9; Fleming & Easting 1994:51-2, 89-90 & 132-3; VanEvery 1995b:115-6). In this arena, direct participation in paid employment can re-emerge as the primary basis on which the entitlement to engage in discretionary spending is legitimated. Lacking a direct relationship to paid work, non-earning partners often restrict their personal spending. This is well illustrated in the comments Paula makes as she reflects on her experience of the transition from earning to non-earning:

*Vivienne:* You mentioned last time that you felt quite financially dependent on Jonathan because he is earning all of the money at the moment, what are some of the consequences of that for you?

*Paula:* Well, just because of the way that I am it makes it harder for me to spend money. I know if I was earning it would be a lot easier to spend it.

*Vivienne:* Why is that?

*Paula:* I don't know. I guess I have always been quite independent with my money from when I started university. And it was my money and I could do with it what I wanted to. And even though, I mean Jonathan is really insistent that I am doing a job and he is doing a job. And it is just that I am not getting paid for it and, therefore, his money covers what we both do. It is just something in my mind tells me that I am capable of earning money and I am not at the moment, therefore, you know -

Paula's sense of her right to spend money as she pleases is diminished through the deployment of a distinction between earning and non-earning (or wage labour and non-wage labour). This distinction contradicts the 'our money' ethos of JMM (see Burgoyne 1990: 654-9; Fleming & Easting 1994:89-90 & 132-3; VanEvery 1995b:115-6). Constructing the right to control the use of money according to employment status leads to a perception that money is an individually owned resource: it belongs to 'him' or 'her'. Access to this resource is mediated through the person



who owns it; in the final instance, they have the power to determine the conditions attached to its usage. These conditions may be more or less equitable as studies of allocative systems have demonstrated (Pahl 1989, 1990; Burgoyne 1990; Vogler & Pahl 1994; Fleming & Easting 1994).

When the ownership and control of financial resources is distributed along the lines described above it establishes the framework through which monitoring of expenditure can occur. However, it may not be the earner who takes on this role. In the following extract the requirement to monitor spending has been internalised:

*Paula:* ... I still can't justify it to myself. It is not Jonathan I have to justify it to, it is me. How can I justify spending a hundred dollars on clothes or whatever?

By locating herself as a non-earning dependent Paula becomes a self-policing subject, a subject who spends 'their/his' money less freely than she would if it were 'her' own money.

The preceding comments need to be read in conjunction with other remarks that Paula made about her spending practices:

*Paula:* ...I find it a little bit odd, I don't so much now, but when we first started using a joint account. Like, 'Should I spend this money?' Because I had never ever used anyone else's money before. And that was quite a weird thing. And I have actually got quite used to it now.

*Vivienne:* No qualms?

*Paula:* And if the money is not there, 'Where is the bloody money?' (laughter) 'Rolling in,' it should be. No, I have no qualms about it at all. If he wasn't earning the money I would be and he would be working at home.

*Vivienne:* Do ever feel like you have to justify how you have spent money?

*Paula:* Not at all. The situation that we are in Jonathan is really good at spending money and I am really hopeless. And I always have been. And that is just I guess a product of my upbringing too. I find it really

difficult. It is usually him that has to account to me for how he is spending the money. 'What are you doing spending that money on?' But that is just the way we are so there is never going to be a problem there, I don't think.

The picture presented here by Paula of her spending practices is one of complexity and contradiction. Paula expresses reservations about spending money that she has not 'earned,' yet she also asserts ownership rights by making Jonathan answerable to her for how he uses 'their' money. Ultimately, she credits their different spending behaviours to differences in temperament. But Burgoyne argues that this non-politicised reading actually disguises gendered differences in spending practices that arise from gendered patterns of paid work (1990:659).

It is important to understand that some of the contradictions that Paula's account highlights are attributable to tensions in the social sphere and are not just a consequence of the failure of JMM, or the inadequacies of particular couples. Within the 'public sphere' money is governed by the principles of what Singh and Lindsay call 'market money' (1996:58-9). Market money is 'calculable, accountable, contractual, individual and impersonal' (Singh & Lindsay 1996:58-9). Constructed in these terms money is treated, within the public domain, as an individual possession that brings rights of control as well as the obligation to pay taxes.

Claims for a share of this money are derived from relationships formed within the private sphere. Within this sphere specific relationships have been normatively defined as economic relationships. Which relationships actually count as relationships of financial obligation is culturally and historically variable. Generally speaking it is parental relationships (in New Zealand, until the child reaches economic independence or 25 years) and those of co-residing heterosexual couples that carry financial implications. Thus, when heterosexual couples are established there is a widespread expectation that the rules of 'market money' will

be supplanted by those of 'marriage money,' at least for the duration of the relationship. If the relationship should breakdown, however, then 'marriage money' reverts to 'market money'. Money that was defined as 'ours' is transformed once again to 'yours' and 'mine'. This reversion underscores the contractual, and often temporary, character of 'marriage money'. It suggests that in the final analysis the true right of ownership, and hence control, belongs to the earner.

## II

In the rest of this chapter the discussion of money management shifts to the practice of independent money management (IMM), or what Singh and Lindsay call 'cohabitation money' (Singh & Lindsay 1996:58). Just as female cohabitees in Blumstein and Schwartz' study adopted independent money management to signify their intention to be economically self-sufficient (1983:61-2), many of the women I interviewed also positioned themselves within the discourse of IMM in order to symbolise that they were 'doing their part' (Nina).<sup>3</sup> Making financial contributions clearly visible, it has been argued, is crucial to the formation of more equitable power relations within heterosexual partnerships (Burgoyne 1990:638; and Hertz, cited in Burgoyne 1990).

Yet the practice of IMM is also symbolic of a level of economic disaggregation that departs from the norms associated with (heterosexual) coupledness, particularly its marital form. In the absence of merged finances, the relationship of these cohabitees may more closely resemble that of flatmates rather

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<sup>3</sup> For male cohabitees the adoption of this form of money management may represent their rejection of the role of the male provider (Blumstein & Schwartz 1983:62).

than that of married couples (Singh & Lindsay 1996:61). The refusal of a strongly defined economic 'we' through the use of IMM can be plausibly read as the economic equivalent of the desire, expressed by many of the women with whom I spoke, for the retention of an independent social identity. In this manner, the practices involved in IMM affords the symbolic preservation of an independent and autonomous economic identity.

The emphasis on independence within IMM stands in opposition to the position of financial dependant offered to women within the discursive construction of marriage as a relationship between a breadwinning husband and a domestically orientated wife. Financial dependency, according to the women with whom I spoke, establishes the basis for the exercise of power by men within marriage and other intimate relationships. The anticipated repercussions of financial dependency are expounded upon by Rachel in the quote below:

*Rachel:* ...I would consider it a great loss of power if you are dependent on another person for money, say if I didn't have any. ... And I can see how you would end up having horrible arguments.

*Vivienne:* What would you argue about?

*Rachel:* What we spend money on. You know who considers what to be more important. Is this expenditure more important than other sorts of expenditure?

And you know that feeling of dependence on the other person and that if they leave you you would be left with nothing or whatever. Or the person who earns the money might dictate what it gets spent on because 'I earned it.'... You know it is like you have to keep the other person on side. You are not allowed to have a disagreement because they are your life. And you can't live without money these days.

Rachel's perspective suggests that financial dependence introduces power into relationships through the nexus of need: the need for ongoing access to a vital material resource, money; hence, the need for a particular relationship to continue.

Positioned as the ones who need, dependants often restrict their engagement in risky behaviours. Autonomous spending is one such behaviour. Another is contesting the definition, advanced by the one who is 'needed', of what constitutes appropriate expenditure.

The problem with this kind of analysis is that it fails to take into account the ameliorating effect of different money management practices and consequently oversimplifies the impact of financial dependence. Nor does the critique allow for the impact of subversive strategies, for example deception, on the exercise of power by the one who is the 'earner' or major source of household resources.

Having rejected merged finances, how then does the system of IMM operate? There are several distinguishing features of this system. The system relies on both individuals having access to separate incomes from whatever source.<sup>4</sup> Control over this income stays with the individual concerned: what is hers remains hers and what is his remains his. IMM thereby entrenches the principle of earner control of financial resources. On a practical level, IMM relies on a distinction between joint and personal expenditure, where joint expenses are usually conceptualised as day-to-day bills like the rent (or mortgage), food, petrol, telephone and electricity (see also Singh & Lindsay 1994:61). These joint expenses are typically covered through some form of contribution from each partner. It is worth noting that what is included and excluded from the joint list can have significant repercussions for how much each person has left in their personal purse.

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<sup>4</sup> Being in receipt of a separate income can be threatened at crucial junctures by the birth of a child, full-time education or training, or unemployment. The State, with very few exceptions, treats co-residing heterosexual couples as if they were married – the 'cohabitation rule' – and pays benefits and allowances according to the size of a partner's income. Where both parties to a relationship seek state funded income support it is worth noting that the monetary value of the 'married' benefit is less than the sum of two 'single' benefits. As a consequence of these state policies, cohabitees who lose access to their own income are, if they wish to live legally, compelled to enter into relations of financial dependency.

Amongst the cohabitees using IMM with whom I spoke there was considerable variation in how they organised their contributions to the joint bills. Some simply paid half of the joint expenses as these were incurred. Others took responsibility for a set range of bills. This might entail one person paying for the groceries and telephone on a regular basis while the other person covered the electricity and rent. Still others operated by periodically balancing how much each person had spent recently to ensure an even split. Sometimes recourse was made to a combination of these styles. For instance, those who apportioned joint costs through a set range of bills might on occasion also engage in the balancing of accounts .

Regardless of the exact method chosen, the basic premise behind the division of joint expenses, with one exception, tended to be the notion of a fifty-fifty split (see also Singh & Lindsay 1994:61).<sup>5</sup> The perceived advantages of this aspect of IMM are outlined by Rachel:

*Vivienne:* What do you like about it?

*Rachel:* What do I like about it? There is no resentment, or a feeling that I am paying more for things, or that you are not doing your share. There is none of that. It brings us back to that equality thing and still lets me be an individual because there are some things that are mine. Everything does not belong to us.

Critical to the attractiveness of IMM is the idea that this system facilitates the achievement of two features of an ideal relationship, equality and independence. Equality, in this instance, is defined as the division of collective expenses according to the fifty-fifty rule. Where the earnings of both members of a couple are roughly

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<sup>5</sup> As the exception, Barbara paid Matthew a nominal set amount for food, telephone and electricity because of the subsistence nature of her income. This arrangement posed its own dilemmas as I shall discuss later in this chapter.

similar the major difficulty arising from this stipulation may simply be one of logistics: how do you keep track of who paid for what, and when?

In certain circumstances the presumed equity of IMM is questionable. This is most apparent when a large discrepancy in income level exists. Where incomes are vastly different the use of a fifty-fifty split will result in one partner paying a much higher proportion of their income towards the couple's joint expenses, whilst also leaving that person with far less money to spend on their personal needs after they have paid their dues (Blumstein & Schwartz 1983:83 & 327; Melton 1992:91; Fleming & Easting 1994:61). This partner, in a social context where women's average weekly earnings are still only 77% of the male average, is much more likely to be female (Statistics NZ 1996:300). In this situation, the use of IMM simply transports the inequalities of a gendered labour market into the domestic environment.<sup>6</sup>

The inequities associated with this outcome exposes the difficulties associated with the use of 'sameness' as the basis upon which equality is pursued (Scott 1988a:44-6). When 'sameness' is emphasised important differences can easily remain hidden from view (Scott 1988a:46). This may mean, in the specific case of IMM, that the constraining effects of a variation in the size of one's spending pool are unrecognised, or even worse viewed as 'fair'. Countering inequity, as Scott argues, requires an attentiveness to difference (1988a:38 & 45-6). With respect to the practice of IMM, the achievement of financial equality may necessitate the use of variable contributions to joint expenses in order to leave each partner with a comparable personal pool (see VanEvery 1995b:117).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> VanEvery outlines several tactics used by her interviewees to compensate for differences in income levels (1995b:117). One strategy involved the richer party paying for dinner out and other forms of entertainment.

<sup>7</sup> Where incomes approximate, IMM closely resembles the practice of income splitting. Income splitting involves the pooling of both partners' incomes and the subsequent equal division of this pooled income. At this point the system operates like IMM with each partner paying half of the couple's joint expenses and retaining individual control over the rest. When incomes are not comparable, income

Challenged about the possibility that the use of fifty-fifty contributions does not necessarily produce equality, Rachel responded in the following manner:

*Vivienne:* Can you imagine a context in which paying fifty-fifty wouldn't translate into equality?

*Rachel:* Yes, if you were doing it with everything. Say if you had a joint cheque account and anything that either of you wanted to buy you bought out of that, you could end up in some real arguments. 'What did you spend money on that for?'

Here Rachel reveals another facet of what equality means. Equality, in the context of IMM, is constructed as an issue of equal control over how money gets spent. Specifically, equality means equal power to determine how money is used, rather than the more usual equal access to equal amounts of money (Fleming & Easting 1994:58-9). Within IMM, equality hinges on the preservation of a domain of autonomy free from struggles for the power to define what constitutes proper expenditure. This domain of autonomy is established through the retention of individual control over one's own income.

The issue of equality is, thus, closely entwined with the question of autonomy. And autonomy requires financial independence:

*Barbara* ...I want to pay my obligations to the communal expenses, but then I don't want to be called to account for whether I spend my money on cigarettes or magazines or cups of coffee or lunch. I don't want to have to explain.

IMM facilitates the achievement of the dual goals of equality and autonomy. Women demonstrate their equality through their payment of half of the collective expenses, and experience autonomy by having some money over which they have

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splitting may overcome some the difficulties I have highlighted (Fleming & Easting 1994:43).



absolute spending rights. The need to ask and seek approval for money to cover personal purchases is obviated by this system (Fleming & Easting 1994:20). And this is one of the prime advantages of retaining individual ownership and control of financial resources.

### III

As a strategy enacted to prevent a relationship of control from developing, IMM entails the carving out of a 'zone of freedom', a space in which the supervisory gaze of another is supposed to be absent. However, the creation of a 'zone of freedom' is not without contradictions. Although the question of how one spends one's own money is constructed as a personal or private issue, it is nevertheless susceptible to a normalising gaze. Even when couples operate an independent money management system, it is still possible for the policing of spending preferences to occur.

To illustrate this point I want to focus once again on Olivia and Steve. In this chapter, however, I am particularly interested in examining their financial arrangements and how they negotiated the sometimes conflicting priorities of joint and autonomous expenditure. This tension is addressed by Steve in the following manner:

*Steve:* ...we run our money totally separately. We have our own money which is fair enough, but we both pay the bills and things like that. And we try and get some money ahead so that we can get something nice or get something done.

And Olivia is more, she'll go out and spend, not just on things for herself, she will get things for me too. And that is really neat. But they are all like extras. That is how I see them as all extras. I probably wouldn't buy things for myself unless I was in real need....

Like she was living, I don't know I just see it as totally unrealistic. She had so many pairs of shoes and bits of clothes that she never wore. And I just don't think that there is any need. And I just sort of rammed that home and home and home. And now, like she still buys things, but not so expensive.

As this extract makes explicit, the boundaries that are erected between 'joint' and 'personal' monies in this system of money management are porous. Holding money individually does not totally transcend the claims that can be made on behalf of the couple.

In fact, the demands of the 'we' provides one point of entry for the operation of disciplinary power:<sup>8</sup>

*Olivia:* ...I mean if I wanted to go and blow all my money that would be fine. But I mean he would be pissed off because I couldn't put in my share. But then I feel I have an obligation to pay my way.

The freedom to spend on 'personal' items still needs to be negotiated within the framework of what the other considers reasonable because the amount of money an individual has available to contribute to joint expenses is dependent, in part, on the 'personal' spending decisions s/he makes.

Unlike other systems of money management, the 'right' to comment on another's spending choices within the system of independent money management is derived solely from one's status as a member of the couple and not from one's status as a (part-)owner of financial resources. Yet, power operates similarly through the process of establishing a standard of what is considered reasonable (or necessary) expenditure that is then supposed to be adhered to by each member of the couple. Critical comments are, therefore, a means of exerting pressure on the spending patterns of one's partner, as Fleming and Easting also observed (1994:53).

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<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of my understanding of the concept of disciplinary power please refer to pp. 106-8.

In the foregoing exchange Steve positions himself as the arbiter of what constitutes the appropriate use of financial resources. He believes that Olivia should also bring her spending habits into line with his precepts. As 'truths' he imagines that his statements are incontrovertible and that they should gain ascendancy, despite his endorsement of the principle of financial independence. Monitoring the amount of money that Olivia has available to contribute to the expenses of the couple provides an opening through which Steve can attempt to enforce his standards:

*Steve:* ...And yet we still have got the freedom of our own money, you know. But then like, if the other person hasn't enough money and they have spent, you know you just see things around the house, and if you say 'Can you pay for this?' And, 'I haven't got any money.' And you go, 'Why haven't you? You just got paid. What is the story?' It is hard to keep secrets.

Ironically, it is precisely this form of control that the use of IMM is supposed to avoid.

The question that arises at this point is why Steve's discursive construction of spending priorities prevails? I would like to suggest that Olivia's willingness to comply to some extent with Steve's ideas about money is partly the outcome of her greater relational orientation:

*Olivia:* ...He is an incredibly independent person. He has his band and his sport which he really gets into. And we have this problem in that I like to stay at home and read and garden and he doesn't see that as doing stuff. So we have this real thing where I get really bored and he will say, 'Go out and do something.' And I just wanted to relax with him. I sort of like people. And that has often made me feel anxious because I feel dependent on him.

As a result of Olivia's relational orientation, goals and dreams that stem from being part of a couple displace those that preceded the existence of the relationship. This shift in aspirations may not be externally imposed, by male partners for instance, but the outcome of a refocusing of one's desires:

*Olivia:* ...I think it comes down to I have this responsibility in my mind that I can't go and blow heaps of money because there is so much we want to do in the house and that is really important. Whereas I used to, when I was flatting I would just go out and buy masses of clothes, anything I wanted, now I am not like that. It is not so much of a priority as it is to get some nice terracotta pots or something. My priorities have changed. My likes and wants and needs have sort of changed too.

Olivia's willingness to reorientate her desires, and to accept Steve's intervention in her spending practices, is reinforced by her investment in the continuation of the relationship which has existed against the backdrop of feeling uncertain about its future:

*Olivia:* ...Earlier on I sort of felt insecure. Like I say I didn't want to be too vulnerable, too open so that if anything went wrong, and I always perceived that something would go wrong, I wouldn't lose any face.

Questions about emotional dependency and commitment form a critical part of the context in which negotiations surrounding relational issues like that of money, or housework, occur. When one party to a relationship is understood to be more committed, or emotionally dependent, the likelihood increases that they will comply with the other's ideas about expenditure. Thus, the battle for the 'right' to determine how money should be utilised may be played out indirectly through a struggle over who is constituted as being the most emotionally attached to the relationship.

Noting Olivia's reservations in the realm of spending is not meant to imply the absence of dissent on her behalf. The exercise of power is, as Foucault contends ([1978] 1990:95), always accompanied by resistance, even if this only occurs at the symbolic level:

*Steve:* ... But now she has me on. She says, 'Guess how much it was?' And I go, 'About 50.' And she puts on a face, and I go, '70.' And she goes, 'It was 20,' or something like that.

Steve's comments indicate that Olivia signals her resistance to his authority in this arena through teasing and joking (see Fleming & Easting 1994:53). Joking provides an avenue through which Olivia can contest, in light-hearted fashion, Steve's position as financial expert by upholding herself as somebody who is able to identify 'a bargain': Olivia displays thrift even as she spends. Although Olivia has moderated her spending behaviour to more closely comply with Steve's expectations her teasing indicates that she is not totally submissive.

Exhibiting this characteristic permits Olivia to maintain that she is ultimately in control of her spending decisions:

*Olivia:* ...I have no qualms about buying anything. I just don't. If I want to buy it I will buy it. But usually, as I say, I will confer with him. 'There is this amazing dress I want.' And he will say, 'It is up to you.'

The practice, however, of seeking his approval for discretionary purchases, like clothes, establishes Steve as someone who scrutinises her spending and this undermines her claim to be autonomous. While Steve occupies this position as someone who monitors her spending, Olivia can 'feel' autonomous because she has personal income: the money she spends is 'hers.' Being in possession of her own money symbolises her independence from Steve. It is from this position that she can state that she buys what she wants and thereby constitute herself as someone over whom Steve does not exercise power.

The preceding account of Olivia and Steve's financial arrangements illustrates the complexity that surrounds this arena of coupled life. It indicates that this arena is permeated by emotional issues. Sociological discussions of allocative systems have, at times, commented on the emotional implications of financial need and financial dependency. Yet these analyses have been less concerned with the reverse scenario: the impact of emotional need and attachment on financial negotiations. Olivia draws attention to the role emotions can play within this context. Financial need is not the only need through which power can be exercised. It is important, therefore, to consider how emotional issues condition the negotiations that take place around money.<sup>9</sup> Feeling emotionally vulnerable, because the future of a relationship is uncertain, may lead to the avoidance of risky behaviours like 'over-spending'. On the other hand, high levels of security might facilitate a greater willingness to contest the spending preferences of a partner.<sup>10</sup>

Just as financial need does not rule out acts of resistance, emotional attachment to a relationship does not guarantee compliance. Having said this, instances of non-compliance may be more symbolic than actual. Non-compliance might take the form of teasing about the amount spent, rather than spending large sums of money. Yet concessions may also be more symbolic than real. Olivia's consultations with Steve about her purchases might be pursued in order to placate him, even as she knows that she can spend within the constraints imposed by their joint obligations because the money she spends is her own.

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<sup>9</sup> Duncombe and Marsden make this point in their discussion of the terrain in which their research into the inter-relationship between the emotional and the economic lives of sixty couples is located (1993:225).

<sup>10</sup> The relationship between emotional security, cohabitation and marriage is addressed in depth in Chapters six and nine.

## IV

At other times, it is not the claims that are initiated as a result of a person's status as a member of a couple that act as the vehicles of constraint, but a notion of what is legitimate or fair:

*Barbara:* But you know we have different ideas about money and I don't feel that I have a right to force my ideas onto someone else. I don't tell him what to do.

*Vivienne:* When it would mean spending his money?

*Barbara:* Yeah, I'm happy to go along with his ideas, to do what he would like to do. But he prefers to spend his money on going on overseas trips, which is fine. But if it was me I would probably spend more money on just luxury day-to-day things. You know luxury food. Going out more to restaurants and that sort of thing. Clothes. Things like that.

Barbara suggests that the legitimate right to guide how money is spent is derived solely from the direct possession of financial resources. This sentiment is indicative of her adherence to one of the key components of the discourse of IMM, the notion that earning confers the entitlement to dictate how that money is utilised.

In control of a substantially smaller pool of money, Barbara constructs any attempts that she might make to influence Matthew's spending preferences as (potentially) an exercise of power.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the shaping of her life that occurs as a result of Matthew's spending practices is not seen to involve power: his acts are legitimate and hence innocent. Thus, the division between legitimate and illegitimate rights, on the basis of who directly earned the money, serves to disguise aspects of the way power is available to different partners in this relationship.

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<sup>11</sup> The details of Barbara and Matthew's financial arrangements are described later in this chapter on p. 175.

This underlines one of the contradictions of the system of independent money management. While IMM is often implemented to undermine the traditional inequalities within marriages and create egalitarian relationships, it can operate to establish disparities in power. This is especially evident in those couples, like Barbara and Matthew, where one partner earns much less than the other. Having entrenched the principle of earner control, the ability to make purchases or initiate particular activities may, for the person who earns less, be entirely dependent on winning the support of the other. Paradoxically, instead of diminishing the significance of money as the arbiter in decision-making, IMM can turn money into the sole-determining factor. Thus, the power of money to order lives may be reinforced: If you want something to be a particular way, then you pay for it:

*Barbara:* ...I wouldn't ask someone to go and see something and then assume that they are going to pay. It is whoever thought of it pays. Like if I say, 'Lets go and do such-and-such,' it is my shout. Or if Matthew says it, it is his shout. So it sort of works out like that. Or if I want a particular movie in the video shop that he is not keen on I'll pay because it might be a disaster.

In Barbara's relationship, suggesting that as a couple you engage in a certain leisure activity means that you are willing to pay for the costs associated with that activity. It is a rule that establishes payment according to initiation, rather than on the basis of who can most afford it. The size of an individual's personal purse, therefore, shapes who has the power to initiate which activities. When funds are short, the implication of this arrangement is that you might engage less frequently in your preferred pursuits as you settle for cheaper activities instead, or spend time doing things initiated by a partner with more discretionary income.



Barbara, because she lacks sufficient funds of her own, at times responds to this code of behaviour by restricting what she suggests. In the following discussion this point is taken up in conjunction with a planned trip overseas:

*Vivienne:* And with the trip, has where you will go been mostly decided by Matthew?

*Barbara:* No. No. I have very much gone on where he has wanted because he paid for it. No, if I was paying to go overseas I would, we would, we would talk about where we were going. Oh, we do talk about where we are going. We don't go to places that I have strong feelings about.

Once again the negative impact of apportioning decision-making power on the basis of monetary contributions can be seen here. Regulating herself according to this principle, Barbara restricts the articulation of her preferences and merely vetoes Matthew's plans. At one level, Barbara's adherence to this position appears to leave her without influence — she has very little say in where they are to go. However, the cessation of the kind of influence she might wield in the situation described above is done in accordance with the bargain she has struck with Matthew through the use of IMM: in return for her silence Barbara is free to determine how she spends her own money. As I noted earlier, this tactic is deliberately pursued in order to avoid the negative repercussions of being positioned as a dependent 'wife'.

Although I argued previously that the deleterious effects of IMM probably follow gendered lines, this is not inevitable. Because Rachel has been the recipient of several large inheritances, her financial situation is much better than Andrew's. Access to this sum of money has enabled Rachel to purchase, independently of Andrew, a number of important material possessions that are jointly used, like the car and the washing machine:

*Vivienne:* You own the car and washing machine, does that translate into any extra rights over them?

- Rachel:* Not rights. I think only if we split up would they translate into, they would go with me and not with Andrew.
- Vivienne:* What about the car?
- Rachel:* Well I bought the car and I pay for the repair bills. And Andrew pays half the running expenses which is petrol, the warrants, and he is going to try and pay half the registration next time it comes round.
- Vivienne:* Does he use it?
- Rachel:* Oh yeah he uses the car as much as I do. He is a fair weather biker. So he is allowed to use the car. But, you know, if I want to use it, then he has got to fit in with me rather than the other way around.
- Vivienne:* Is it fair to say then that money and the purchase of things translates into the power to decide what happens to the things?
- Rachel:* Oh, I would agree with that. You know I can decide what happens to the car because I am spending the money on it and we sort of view that as being fair. If Andrew was going to pay half of everything then he could have equal say.

Here Rachel makes explicit the potential for money to operate, within a system of independent money management, as a vehicle through which relations of power can be constituted.

At first Rachel denies that purchasing goods establishes the basis of control over these items (it also carries the burden of responsibility). This belief is contradicted later as Rachel acknowledges that payment for goods and services forms the condition under which decision-making rights are established. As the person who pays, Rachel assumes a position of control: she can act without recourse to Andrew if she wishes. Constituting the relationship between money and the power to decide in this manner means that the ability and willingness to contribute financially at a comparable level forms the condition upon which input into decisions which have implications for both parties is determined.

Because Andrew is unable to fulfil these conditions, he must consult with Rachel over the use of such things as the car, and adapt his plans to harmonise with

hers when their preferences conflict. In contributing more than Andrew to the costs associated with the car, Rachel positions herself as the person whose needs and wants have priority in this field. By spending greater amounts, Rachel stakes a claim for her advantage in their negotiations. Such an arrangement is understood, by Rachel, to be 'fair'. Within IMM the standard for 'fairness' is conceptualised as equal rights of determination over your own financial resources, and equal rights of determination over joint expenditure (or joint possessions) when equal monetary contributions are being made. By entrenching these rights the definition of equality offered with the discourse of IMM is more closely akin to that of autonomy, the freedom to act without experiencing the restrictive impact of the other party to a relationship.

## V

In the final section of this chapter, I want to continue to ponder some of the contradictory consequences that can arise from the use of the practice of IMM through an ongoing examination of Barbara's discussion of her relationship with Matthew.<sup>12</sup> As I contemplate what Barbara said to me during the course of our interview I am conscious of the multiplicity of positions which she inhabits. These positions operate synergistically to produce the apparent intractability of her situation. Although the exact mix of these positionings may be unique to Barbara, I believe that an analysis will prove valuable; both in terms of the repercussions of these discourses as 'abstracted' forms, and also of the way in which discursive positionings can interact.

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<sup>12</sup> Lacking interview material from Matthew (because of Barbara's opposition) I cannot enter into a direct discussion of his views (which might involve the strategic use of a variety of discourses) on these matters.

In some ways Barbara's situation is atypical. Not only is Barbara in receipt of considerably less money than Matthew, she also pays a set figure to Matthew in contrast to the very similar amounts contributed by most of the other women who utilise a system of independent money management. Barbara's payment covered her share of their food, electricity and telephone bills, but excluded the expenses associated with owning and operating a house (which Matthew owned) like mortgage payments, insurance and rates. The exclusion of these expenses stems from the meanings attributed to 'ownership' within the discourse of IMM. Ownership, as I noted earlier, confers responsibilities and obligations as well as rights of control. For Barbara, this particular rendition of the meaning of ownership frees her from any obligation to share in the costs connected with the house.

Barbara's approach to the question of ownership exists alongside her desire to maintain a sense of herself as an autonomous individual:

*Vivienne:* How important is financial independence for you?

*Barbara:* Oh, that is important. I couldn't work any other way. I really wouldn't want a joint account or anything like that. That would be dreadful. I don't want to have to account for how I spend money.

This disinterest in the idea of a financial merger with Matthew for day-to-day expenses extends to reservations about the acquisition of joint commodities, for example furnishings. Barbara's disinclination to combine assets symbolises her rejection of a coupled identity and indicates her lack of commitment to this relationship: she lives with an eye directed towards a future without Matthew:

*Barbara:* ...I don't want to get involved with things that have to be split or sold. And neither does he. Having gone through a divorce and the extremes of acrimony he wouldn't want to do it again. ... I would just take what was mine.

Yet the separation of their material assets may not always operate to produce independence from Matthew for Barbara. This was made explicit when Barbara, reflecting on the precarious nature of her material well-being, described herself, without any prior prompting from me, as 'kept':

*Vivienne:* How do you feel about it when you think about it in terms of being 'a kept woman'?

*Barbara:* Oh, I have mixed feelings about that. It makes me less, I don't know 'kept' in the sense that if I was to go out on my own I would be living back in place with a few other students or something. My standard of living would be reduced in terms of televisions and videos and all that sort of stuff. There are a lot of things, I wouldn't be able to afford to buy a computer.

As somebody who is 'kept' by another, Barbara is acutely aware that her ongoing access to a lifestyle that she is unable to provide for herself is dependent on the maintenance of her relationship with Matthew.

In turn the continuance of this relationship is, as Barbara asserts, dependent on her fulfilment of the conditions of what she calls the 'old marriage bargain'. The dimensions of this bargain are outlined below:

*Barbara:* ...Generally women have more control of their sexuality than men have been taught to have I suppose. And so I think that women generally control the frequency. And I think men generally like more frequent sex than women would if they were left to their own devices. So it [sex] becomes a form of exchange. And I realise, as I say this, that it sounds like I am in an appalling relationship where I am being 'kept' for sexual favours. Which isn't the way it is at all. It is something that I am in control of. And it certainly is something my partner would be absolutely appalled to hear me say.

Aware that her version of the nature of the underpinnings of their relationship is not something that Matthew will concur with, in fact quite the opposite, Barbara declares that while the bargain is 'absolutely understood,' 'it is a very hidden part of relationships...that happens at a most unspoken level and most people would deny that it was going on vehemently.'

Feminists have been critical of this bargain, aligning it with prostitution, because it makes sex compulsory (within marriage) for women:

... marriage is a form that conflates the sexual with the economic: as Engels so crisply pointed out, monogamous marriage and prostitution were born in the same moment.

(Barrett & McIntosh 1982:56)

Conscious of the possibility that exists for a pejorative reading of her relationship along these lines Barbara counters it by insisting that 'there is no pressure. I am in control of when we make love.'

Barbara also argues for a more complex way of conceptualising the 'marital bargain.' According to Barbara, women's bodies are 'something that they have to exchange' which provides women with an important 'source of power within the relationship in the sense that it balances any other inequality.' This is, from Barbara's perspective, particularly significant when 'the economic difference is unequal.' Because as Barbara maintains:

**Barbara:** ...I mean financial dire straits don't drive many men onto the streets to sell their bodies because their bodies don't have that much value. I don't think very many people would pay for them.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Barbara's use of 'people' in this quote to refer specifically to women is indicative of the heterosexual framework within which she is operating. Male bodies do have a street value, but the people who are willing to pay for them are predominantly other men.

Barbara's suggested re-interpretation of the 'kept woman exchange' includes an assertion of the mutual nature of the compact. After all it is based on an exchange of his need for sexual and emotional intimacy with her needs for material resources:

*Barbara:* ...I feel I am getting some, a real exchange in that I have financial material security which I have never been very good at providing for myself.

Barbara's choices are, nevertheless, circumscribed by the definition of her relationship in these terms. She is a sub/ject of the 'kept woman exchange.' The durability of this bargain hinges on Barbara's fulfilment of her sexual obligations. In this context, the choice to become celibate would, as Barbara recognises, jeopardise the future of her relationship with Matthew:

*Barbara:* ...I would say, for example, that if I was to decide to be celibate in the relationship, which I have at times felt like doing, I don't think it would hang together for more than a few months. I mean it wouldn't just be out the door, but I think there is an unspoken (trails off).

The anticipated ramifications of a complete refusal to engage in sexual relations is indicative of the existence of a contradiction between Barbara's claim to be in control of her sexual life and her inability to opt for celibacy without challenging the viability of her relationship with Matthew.

Barbara's claim to be in control is derived from the particular construction she gives to male and female sexuality. This construction of sexual difference prompts Barbara to believe that as a woman she is less desirous of sex. Given their respective predispositions towards sex, Barbara considers herself to be in possession of something — a sexual body — that Matthew wants, something she can strategically withhold without injury to herself. That is without injury to her sexual self, but not without potential injury to her economic self. Barbara finds that

she must, at times, choose to suppress the desires of her sexual self in order to prioritise the needs and wants of her economic self. In other words, the tension between these selves requires that she engages in acts of self-regulation.

Operating within the terms of the bargain that she has struck with Matthew, Barbara is in many ways positioned less advantageously than if she were married. Her material 'security' has a temporal quality.

*Barbara:* ...I mean some people would think I was crazy for not insisting that I have a share of — You know we have been together for five years now and I don't have a roof over my head that is my own. And if the relationship was to break up I would pack up my bags and leave. And I wouldn't feel that this was any longer my place. So I don't have the security. It is all right as long as we are together. I'm a bit insecure at that level.

Whereas Barbara's access to material resources is dependent on the survival of her relationship with Matthew, women who marry their partners under current New Zealand legislation retain a right to a share in the property acquired during the marriage even after the breakdown of their relationships. For married women this right exists by virtue of the formation of a marital bond of reasonable duration.<sup>14</sup> It is not reliant upon the extent of their financial contributions or their engagement in domestic work and child-care.

Barbara refuses to stake a claim to a share in the household property because such a claim could only stem from illegitimate grounds, the presumptions of partnership:

*Barbara:* I mean it is like people always assume that I have a part share in whatever. You know they will talk about 'our house' or 'our things.'

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<sup>14</sup> The Matrimonial Property Act 1976 specifies that a marriage needs to have been in existence for at least three years before the principle of a fifty-fifty split of the couple's assets will apply.



And people look very surprised when I correct them, 'They are not mine.'

*Vivienne:* They are your partner's?

*Barbara:* Yeah. And they find this odd. Even if you are living with someone there seems to be an unspoken assumption that you somehow have a share in— I mean these are things that have nothing to do with you. You know that any property and so forth was around long before you were and has absolutely nothing to do with you. It is not as if you have done a share of the labour which has gone into producing the money for the thing.

*Vivienne:* What about things that have happened after you have been in a partnership?

*Barbara:* Like joint? I have never got into buying joint stuff. Everything is quite separate. And on the other hand, I don't pay. If I was paying rates or something like that then yes, I would feel I had a right to say this is partly mine. But because that is kept separate and it is done, I guess, on an unspoken assumption that if we were to part we would part with our own things intact, what we brought into the relationship.

From Barbara's point of view legitimate property rights between cohabitantes are established through monetary payments. Or, in the absence of financial contributions, through domestic labour and child-care. Fulfilling neither of these conditions, Barbara believes she is unable to justify a claim to a share in the possessions that form her daily habitat. Her disclaimer exists in spite of her recognition that her emotional contribution to the relationship is greater than his. Emotional and sexual servicing are, within this particular discursive construction of property rights, less valuable activities than other forms of domestic labour, for instance child rearing and house cleaning. To accept a construction of emotional and sexual servicing as having a monetary value poses a major challenge to the idea that these behaviours are the product of 'love.' In so doing, the boundaries between prostitution and intimate partnerships may begin to blur in potentially uncomfortable ways.

## VI

The preservation of separate finances (and sometimes separate possessions) is the key through which those who engage in the practice of IMM pursue equality, independence and autonomy. Separate finances enables the ready divvying up of joint expenses on the basis of a fifty-fifty split, while it also affords each individual personal money over which they have control. By retaining separate money a sense of making an equitable contribution to the relationship is preserved — it is demonstrable in monetary terms — at the same time it establishes a feeling of being autonomous and independent.

The goals of equality and autonomy exist, however, in tension with each other. The demand for equal contributions to joint expenses means that right to spend one's own money as one pleases may be infringed upon. Moreover, when claims to autonomy reside in the possession of personal sums of money, the degree to which any person can experience self-determination is dependent on the size of their income: each partner may not be equally autonomous. Used to oppose the constraints of financial dependency, IMM is unable to produce unfettered independence. Instead the practice of IMM offers independence that is restricted by the demands of the couple's joint spending; by the size of each person's income; and, as we have seen, by the emotional configuration of the relationship.

It is ironic, therefore, that a strategy enacted to produce relationships that are easily distinguished from those of financial dependency by their egalitarian character creates the potential for inequalities to emerge in other guises. The practice of IMM defines equality in terms of equal control over individually earned and separately held funds, without reference to the question of equal access to money. Ignoring this difference forms the basis of the problems that I have outlined with IMM. Without attending to the issue of equality of access, it is unlikely that equality of control will be achieved.

The emphasis on earner control in the discourse of independent money management contrasts markedly with the denunciation of this principle within joint money management. JMM is based on the principle of equal access to the monetary resources of the couple as a whole without any consideration of who actually received the income. Within this system earning money is not supposed to confer extra entitlement rights. However, as I noted in my discussion of JMM, the discourse of earner control undermines the effectivity of this strategy, highlighting the pervasiveness of this discourse.

Perhaps income splitting, a system which seems to attempt to combine the idea of sharing (or equality of access) whilst offering individual autonomy, is the answer to the shortcomings that have been identified with IMM and JMM. In the absence of research into this financial practice such statements belong in the realm of conjecture and speculation. Comparative research (with heterosexual and homosexual couples) that explores the complexity of all three management practices would be timely. The potential to gain critical insights into money management systems from individuals who have recently left a long-term relationship should not be ignored.<sup>15</sup> These people, having taken up a subject position outside of an intimate relationship, may have things of great interest to say about their past monetary practices and future hopes in this arena.

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<sup>15</sup> In a recent article, Burgoyne and Morison (1997) explore the monetary practices of twenty remarried couples. They note, in contrast to the married population at large that this group were more likely to maintain separate finances and to own assets individually.

## MANAGING THE HOUSE: GENDER AT HOME

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Superficially, resistance is about actions, actions that deviate from those that have been deemed socially and culturally appropriate for particular people operating within particular contexts. However, what people actually do may be at odds with their desires, and open to a variety of interpretations. Actions do not, after all, speak for themselves. Crucially, resistance is about an engagement with meaning, the meanings ascribed to our own actions and the actions of others.

Fixing the meaning of certain practices is an important way in which resistant identities are constructed. These practices, symbolic acts if you like, then serve as markers of the successful cultivation of a resistant self. They allow a justifiable telling of ourselves in resistant terms. In other words, the project of resistance is simultaneously a project of self-representation.

I took a more 'global' approach to this issue in previous chapters as I contemplated the use of cohabitation to symbolise resistance to the conventions of marriage. In this chapter I am concerned with the details of cohabittees' practices. I want to focus on how resistance and self-representation is managed through the

use of symbolic acts that give meaning to the distribution of domestic work (including child-care) between cohabitees.

Differentiated by gender, domestic work offers rich possibilities for the emergence of symbolic acts that can be utilised to construct particular versions of our/selves, selves that contest (or reinforce) gendered norms. Domestic work is, therefore, a site that provides scope for actively promoting certain understandings of ourselves in gendered terms: in short, of 'doing gender' (West & Zimmerman 1991:23; see also Ferree 1990:874-7).

By pursuing how cohabitees 'do' gender and resistance I am interested in exploring how subjectivity is always experienced individually, even as it is constructed out of shared discursive resources. Power, as I have claimed in earlier chapters, enters into the process of the constitution of selves. It influences our access to discourses and the subject positions contained therein. The impact of power on the constitution of subjectivity is not limited to one single and isolated moment that reverberates throughout our lives like a shock-wave. Rather, subjectivity is the outcome of our re/positionings in power laden interactions with others, both embodied others, and others in the form of cultural messages contained in things like advertisements.

The people mentioned in this chapter cannot be described as straightforward resisters. As divided individuals they exhibit contradiction and complexity. I do not find this perplexing, unlike Hochschild (1989). Nor, does it contravene my expectations (contra VanEvery 1995a, 1995b). Informed by a postmodern concept of the subject that presupposes a lack of coherence, I have argued throughout this thesis for the co-existence of resistance and compliance.

My work differs substantially from that of Hochschild (1989) and VanEvery (1995a, 1995b) in another respect. It is not an attempt to make generalised claims based on a representative sample of cohabiting couples. I have not attempted to establish the veracity of the accounts contained within this chapter through

observations or time-use diaries. I am not interested in developing complicated explanatory schemas in order to be able to reconcile their contradictions, nor am I concerned with delineating strategies that will produce non-sexist living arrangements. Instead, my focus lies with the construction by the cohabitees who participated in this study of resistant domestic identities, even as they continued to be positioned as gendered domestic subjects.

## I

A refusal to become a 'wife' was matched, for many of the women with whom I spoke, by a concomitant refusal to become a 'housewife'. In avoiding membership in these categories they sought to evade the domestic duties conventionally associated with becoming a 'house-wife'. Because these women were not married – they simply 'lived together' – they saw themselves as resisting traditional gender roles. Herein lies one of the attractions of constructing relational identities in terms of cohabitational discourse. Cohabitation can be utilised to indicate a refusal of the domestic mantle that many people believe is an essential component of marriage. It is important therefore to ask: is the mere fact of cohabiting sufficient to mark someone out as a resistant actor irrespective of how much housework they actually do, or how gendered their division of labour is?

A similar rejection of domesticity is expressed in Dale Spender's *Weddings and Wives* (1994). She notes that women often want to marry and have weddings, but few want to take on the role of wives, to be 'unpaid domestic servants in their husband's households' (Spender 1994:29). VanEvery's research participants also explicitly reject the provision of domestic services by a single person, the 'housewife'. On the basis of their belief in anti-sexism these individuals set out to resist the inequities of a gendered domestic order by installing alternative

principles for distributing housework, for example sharing or swapping (VanEvery 1995). Yet some of the people who participated in VanEvery's research were married. In both examples, marriage is granted a reprieve because new versions of marriage are imagined in which gender ceases to operate as the guiding thread for dividing household chores, and housewifery for married women is no longer obligatory.

The discursive construction of marriage to which many cohabitees adhere prohibits the option of marrying yet 'resisting wifeliness' (Spender 1994:29). From their vantage point, an important aspect of the identity offered to women in marriage continues to be that of a 'housewife'. Accordingly, marriage is viewed as a highly significant site through which gender inequalities are introduced into heterosexual relationships. It follows that marriage must be rejected in order to evade the effects of gender on the distribution of domestic work.

This is the position adopted by Nina in the extract below:

*Vivienne:* Speculatively, if you were to get married would that represent a bigger commitment to your relationship than you have at the moment?

*Nina:* Yeah, because I would feel stupid things like, 'I have to do the dishes or cook the dinner'. You know, just funny things like that because I am married.

*Vivienne:* Because you would now be a 'wife'?

*Nina:* Yeah. And I don't want to be like that.

As Nina outlines it, the acceptance of a position within marital discourse would result in her immediate constitution as a domestic subject. If this was to occur, Nina surmises that she would feel obliged to perform certain household tasks, namely cooking and the dishes. This gendered impulse arises internally and not in response to expectations others, for instance Nathan, may (or may not) have of Nina. In order to avoid this sense of obligation and the domestic servicing it supports, Nina believes she must situate herself outside of marital discourse.

Hence, for Nina marriage resistance is simultaneously resistance to the position of 'housewife'.

Nina's statements are illustrative of the idea, put forward within Foucauldian theory and elaborated on throughout this thesis, that a major vehicle for the exercise of power is the production of subjects through discourse. As I have discussed previously, in accepting a subject position we become sub/jects: that is, we become people whose emotional understandings of our/selves and our relationships conforms to the dictates of the particular discursive framework in which we are currently located. Thus, the formation of our subjectivities is always regulatory. Regulation through this mechanism makes more direct exercises of power, for example through the use of commands and prohibitions, unnecessary. In the absence of such direct interventions we often assume that we are free subjects, the agents of our own destiny. Hence, the exercise of power through the constitution of subjectivity tends to be highly effective.

The discourse of 'flatting' offers an alternative framework for apportioning household chores. Within the discourse of flatting, housework is distributed according to non-gendered precepts. Often 'turn-taking' governs the performance of tasks like grocery shopping, cooking shared meals, and cleaning the bathroom and other jointly used spaces. Unlike other criteria, for instance 'skill' or 'enjoyment', turn-taking is less prone to the covert reintroduction of gender into domestic arena. When skills and preferences are used to determine who engages in which household tasks, the division of labour often reverts to a highly gendered pattern (Blumstein & Schwartz 1983:325). The non-gendered mandates of turn-taking are sympathetic with the principle of 'self-care' (VanEvery 1995a:265). 'Self-care' dictates the taking of individual responsibility for those chores that pertain to personal needs. Laundering clothes typically falls within this embrace.

These features of flatting discourse are highly compatible with aspects of cohabiting discourse and make it a suitable substitution site. When domestic



identities are explicitly constructed through the discourse of flatting the gender neutral features of cohabitation as marriage resistance are reinforced. This strategy has the further effect of distinguishing cohabitation from marriage, and consequently of distancing cohabitation from the gendered norms ascribed to traditional marriage. Flatting discourse is used, in this context, to insist on the difference between cohabitation and marriage in the face of a possible collapse of this distinction: in some discourses cohabitation is 'informal marriage' or a 'de facto marriage'.

The potential utility of flatting discourse is illustrated in the following extract:

*Nina:* ...I really tried not to make it homely. I sort of made up little rules that we were flatting together. Like I drew up a roster. I mean I didn't even do his washing.

Not washing Nathan's clothes is symbolic of Nina's evasion of the expectation that women should look after the personal needs of the men they live with. Moreover, it serves as evidence that Nina has successfully constituted her relationship in flatting terms, and that she and Nathan have, at least in this dimension of their relationship, assumed the identity of flatmates.

Domestic arrangements in flatting households are not assumed in advance. How they are ordered is the outcome of a process of negotiation, sometimes on a repeated basis. Experiences of flatting, especially 'mixed flatting', exposes people to ways of organising housework that necessitate co-operation and negotiation, and affords them access to the language of 'turn-taking' and 'self-care' that can be drawn on to resist 'housewifery'. Widespread participation in this practice since the 1970s has had an effect on coupled relationships, regardless of their marital status. Kimball noted the use of a similar strategy to allocate housework — the 'room-mate test' — amongst some American couples who were in egalitarian marriages (1983:86). This confirms that access to this discursive ordering of

housework allocation is not confined to those who cohabit. However, what is of note is that it is used by those who cohabit to distinguish themselves from those who are married.

When cohabitees have children their ability to constitute themselves as different from married couples through the discourse of flatting becomes problematic. The presence of a child (or children) sets these cohabiting couples apart from the majority of flatting households, whilst it places them in closer proximity to the households of nuclear families which have a married couple as their bases. As 'families', cohabiting couples with children may become indistinguishable from married couples with children. Subsumed within the category of 'the family', the distinction between marriage and cohabitation potentially collapses. For those with children, signifying difference from the conventions of marriage often requires different tactics. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

## II

Like Nina, Michele contrasts the gendered inequalities of marriage with the liberatory dimensions of living together:

*Vivienne:* Are you happy with living together as a lifestyle?

*Michele:* Yes. Like I say when I think of my friend Jillian's marriage as a lifestyle I think it is probably different. I think there is probably more equality. (a sentence later...) And I don't know whether that is because marriage comes back to that traditional role of, 'You are the wife and you do the household work. And I am the husband and I will fix the car and do blah, blah, blah.'  
And when you are living together those ideas sort of go out the door a bit. And it is, 'You pull your weight as just as much as I do.'

According to Michele, the institution of marriage is associated with deep-seated expectations about gendered responsibilities that lead to inequalities. This understanding of marriage makes the constitution of Michele's relationship with Tim through the discourse of cohabitation highly significant: cohabitation increases the likelihood of establishing an equitable relationship because the traditional expectations of marriage cannot be assumed.

Interestingly, as Michele discusses this point she adopts a masculine voice, 'You are the wife'. Through this she positions herself as a male subject viewing 'the wife'. The assumption of this viewpoint is suggestive of two things. Firstly, that Michele believes the establishment of a conventional division of labour is instigated by husbands, and not wives: it is imposed on married women against their wills. Hence, the very existence of a traditional division of labour is, within this construction, indicative of the disproportionate exercise of power by men within marriages. Secondly, in (temporarily) identifying with husbands, Michele distances herself from the powerlessness that she attributes to being a wife. While other women may be a 'wife' in the eyes of men, she is not. At the same time, she alludes to her power to stipulate the conditions that underpin the distribution of household tasks in her relationship. Like the husband who is responsible for the allocation of domestic work according to gender, it is Michele who installs the gender neutral principle of 'pulling your weight' that forms part of the discourse of cohabitation as marriage resistance.

The contribution men make to housework in cohabiting relationships acts as a marker for Michele of the demise of gendered domestic expectations, and therefore of Michele's equal status. Hence, who does the housework in a (heterosexual) household operates as a barometer of equality:

*Vivienne:* What makes you think there is more equality?

*Michele:* When you look at housework and things like that, I mean that is always a good indication to me. How much housework does the man

do? Now sometimes the man can do the cooking, but that is not equality to me. I pin it on the cleaning of the toilet and the bath.

Specifically, it is the cleaning of the toilet and the bathroom that symbolises the existence of gender equity in a domestic environment for Michele. Taken literally, in the absence of any other contributions to household labour, cleaning the toilet and the bathroom serves as a sufficient reason to claim that a relationship does not mimic the inequalities of marriage. The symbolic power of toilet and bathroom cleaning stems from their ranking as perhaps the most demeaning jobs within the range of tasks that comprise housework.

It would seem, in the light of this extract, that Michele determines whether a relationship is equitable on the basis of the performance of key tasks. This leaves aside the question of time. If Tim only cleaned the toilet and the bathroom, and Michele actually undertook the rest of the household chores, then she would unquestionably spend far more time than Tim on domestic work. Would this constitute an equal relationship in Michele's eyes?

The complexity of the issue is made apparent in this follow-on quote from Michele:

*Michele:* ...At the moment Tim would do far more of the household work than me because I am in the middle of a big project and I can't stop. And he takes Emma (their six month daughter) as much as he can too. I think it is good that we both swap roles where sometimes I will be earning money and sometimes he will be the one earning the money, so that you can see it from the other person's perspective, so that you don't moan and grizzle.

Here Michele establishes the veracity of her claim to equality by attesting to the existence of a role-swapping arrangement, whereby Tim undertakes the vast majority of the housework and child-care, while Michele engages in paid employment. This puts into question whether Tim's high level of domestic

involvement cancels out Michele's requirement that men clean the toilet and bathroom? Or does Tim, in spite of his role-swapping, still need to perform these tasks in order to fulfil Michele's symbolic notions of what constitutes gender breaking behaviour? Unfortunately, given the interview material that I have, I am unable to answer this question. Nevertheless, what is highlighted here is that for Michele time spent doing housework and key tasks are both used to define disruptions to the practices associated with traditional marriage. Her resistant subjectivity is symbolised by Tim's performance of more housework than she does and by the knowledge that cleaning the toilet is not always left to her.

Michele's initial use of toilet and bathroom cleaning as a standard of adjudication suggests that the issue of domestic equality is complex and cannot be reduced to a question of time alone. Yet, it is not uncommon for researchers in the field of domestic labour to approach this issue empirically through studies which have a heavy focus on time (Bittman & Lovejoy 1993; Bittman 1991, and Australian Bureau of Statistics 1988, cited in Bittman & Lovejoy 1993; Bittman & Pixley 1997).

A restrictive focus on time is problematic for a number of reasons. To begin with, it assumes that women are non-conflictual subjects located solely within a feminist discourse of domestic equality, rather than subjects constituted through a number of different discourses pertaining to household labour, gendered identities and relationships – to name just a few. Multiple constitution results in a divided subject, a subject who contends with their own conflictual desires as much as they negotiate the contesting desires of others. In the domain of housework, this internal struggle may be played out as a competition between the desire for a male partner to make a fair contribution and a desire to exercise control over when and how things get done. Or perhaps just as significantly, between the desire to have him help at home and the desire to maintain a relatively harmonious relationship.

I have raised these points in order to highlight the complexity of the question of gender equity at home. Who is exercising power within this context

cannot be simply read off from who performs which tasks, and how much time each person spends on housework. Time spent and tasks done are not always accurate indicators of the negotiations that take place within and between individuals over housework. In challenging the assumption that time cannot be used to denote the presence or absence of equality I am not dismissing the relevance of time altogether. The question of time needs to be understood in conjunction with a whole raft of other issues, including how decisions over who does what are arrived at, and what meanings people attach to these distributions.

A number of the criticisms I have made in the preceding paragraphs can be legitimately targeted at Hochschild's *The Second Shift* (1989). In seeking to detail what happens to the division of household chores and child-care when both spouses engage in paid work outside the home, Hochschild carried out extensive interviews and observations in the homes of her participants. During the course of this research, Hochschild noted that people's stated beliefs, their feelings, and their actions were seldom in agreement (1989:13, 14 & 16). Because a modernist concept of the subject underpins Hochschild's work, this difference is posed as a discrepancy that needs reconciling. Hochschild achieves this reconciliation through the development of a theoretical framework that poses the existence within each individual of a 'surface' and 'deep' ideological orientation which often conflict with each other. The resulting tension is resolved through the formulation of a gender strategy that establishes a framework for how domestic work should be divided (Hochschild 1989:15, 17-8).

Amongst the ideas that Hochschild develops, and pertinent to the current discussion, is her notion of a 'family myth' (1989:19). Hochschild defines family myths as those 'versions of reality that obscure a truth in order to manage family tension' (1989:19). In the case of Nancy and Ivan Holt, the 'truth' that is disguised behind a declaration of equality (and substantiated through the performance of designated tasks) is that Nancy spends considerably more time doing housework

than Ivan (1989:43-4). Here Hochschild declares that time is the ultimate arbiter of equality. Any pretence that equality exists in the absence of matching contributions is simply a delusion (1989:44). This is a profoundly patronising concept that implies people, like Nancy, who believe such 'myths' are both stupid and the hapless victims of another's power plays. From this vantage point, it would appear that Nancy is in an oppressive relationship in which she is unable to exercise power or agency. Such a conclusion can only be sustained if a limited perspective is employed that does not consider the distribution of housework within the broader context of the relationship as a whole. Hochschild does attempt to maintain this breadth by noting that Nancy had merely shifted the site of contest and resistance from the sink to the bedroom (1989:45).

### III

Bearing these points in mind I want, at this juncture, to pursue some of the other issues raised by Michele in her discussion of domestic work and role-swapping. When roles are swapped the association between women servicing men through the performance of housework breaks down, challenging a major construct through which dominant renditions of femininity and masculinity are formulated. Not only does this reconfiguration consist in men performing 'atypical' tasks, like cleaning toilets, it is also connected with an unsettling of conventional patterns of dominance and subordination within heterosexual relationships that are brought into being in part through the existence of gendered servicing relationships (Ferree 1990:876; VanEvery 1995b:32). However, as the following lengthy extract makes clear, the impact of role-reversals on the exercise of power is neither simple nor straightforward:

*Michele:* ...Did you read that article in the newspaper about the German couples where the male partner becomes the house-father and the woman goes out to work? And they said that in nine out of ten couples they landed up separating after four years. Because, it said that the men feel that the woman didn't appreciate them. And I thought, 'Oh how does the woman feel when she is in the home all the time?'

But when I read it, I thought it was sort of true because I tend to run over Tim a lot more now that he is at home with Emma and I have to keep stopping myself. And that is where our arguments are coming from. Where I will say 'Do this. Do that.' And I don't know whether the person in the home will always get that. I don't know whether it is because of the money thing. Or perhaps you feel more important because you are seen to be doing something and looking after a child is not considered to be a job, it is something you just do.

Or maybe it is because I still think I am better at running a household. When he came to do all of the chores I knew he wasn't going to do them as well as I would, and I thought, 'Just don't look,' because you are going to find things that he has missed that I wouldn't have missed. And what is the point? I want him to do the job so, 'Just settle for less.' But in doing that I tend not to praise him and say, 'Oh you have cleaned the bath. Oh thanks.' You know, I don't thank him enough. And he sometimes feels that he is not being appreciated. But the reason I don't thank him is that it means that I have got to look and then I will see-

*Vivienne:* That it is not done how you would do it?

*Michele:* Yeah. So I have got to consciously thank him for doing things, and, as I say, stop getting on his back. So it is really me that is the problem.

Through Michele's statements it is possible to begin to trace out some of the contradictory effects that reversing roles has within domestic partnerships. Her comments expose the complex manner in which power is exercised in this setting.



For instance, the position of principal income earner incorporates an expectation that the non-earner will perform domestic chores upon request. In other words, servicing relationships frequently form the flip side of earning relationships. One person provides domestic services in return for access to the earnings of the other person. The distribution of 'earning' and 'servicing' are strongly gendered. In heterosexual relationships, particularly those involving children, men are usually the income earners while women typically assume responsibility for child-care and domestic work. The value attributed to these activities is also highly gendered. Feminised work, like cleaning and child-care, is construed as being of less worth and requiring lower levels of skill than masculinised tasks performed at home or at a site of paid work.

When women earn, however, their expectation that their male partners will carry out the domestic work can cause difficulties, as Michele's comments illustrate: it matters that the gender of the people doing the earning and servicing are different from the norm. This becomes clear when the negotiations Michele and Tim enter into around the housework are contemplated. Michele's requests for Tim to do certain household tasks are often met by Tim's vocal resistance.

His ability to engage in this manner, with any effectiveness, stems from the interplay of a number of different discursive positionings. To begin with, Tim's acceptance of a low status position, that of houseworker, occurs against the backdrop of the maintenance of his ready access to the higher status world of paid employment. The reasons for the instability of his position as a houseworker are both social and personal. The position of houseworker is so tagged with gender that men as houseworkers can appear aberrant and transitory. The air of impermanence is heightened in Tim's case by his freelance work. Together these factors contribute to Tim's ability, at short notice, to disrupt and transform his constitution from that of being a feminised male (a result of orientating his life to the performance of feminised tasks) to that of a masculinised male (through a

return to those public activities that are considered normative for men). The possibility of this shift infuses Tim's occupation of the position of houseworker, diminishing the power differential that is normally present between a homemaker and earner.

The impact of this difference is expressed through an expectation that Tim will be the recipient of appreciation. Expressions of gratitude serve to compensate Tim for his loss of power and status. They also indicate that Tim is Michele's substitute in a way that she is not a substitute for him when she undertakes most of the household chores. Notions of who is a substitute for whom are derived from the wider social context which continues to largely define housework as 'women's work'. This definition informs the assumptions that heterosexual couples bring to their negotiations over housework.

Michele's gratitude is not always forthcoming. The tension Michele experiences around this issue is the outcome of her location in several other discourses. Even though Michele has ceased to carry out much of the housework, she nevertheless continues to constitute herself as a domestic expert in comparison to Tim. This positioning grants her the power to evaluate and criticise the manner in which Tim does household chores. As a domestic expert, Michele gives or withholds thanks on the basis of her 'inspection' of Tim's work. A genuine expression of appreciation, for Michele, requires performance criteria to be met: it is not enough that the tasks are simply done.

Operating against this concept of appreciation is Michele's awareness that her lack of gratitude jeopardises her relationship with Tim. Michele finds support for this view in the arguments that she and Tim have been having, and in the high break-up rate amongst German couples who engage in role-reversing. From this perspective, the longevity of Michele's relationship with Tim appears to rest on thanking him. In an attempt to increase her propensity to feel grateful Michele deliberately moderates the importance she attaches to adhering to certain

standards of performance, 'she settles for less'. Being thus constrained, Michele's capacity to exercise the power she derives from being the domestic expert and principal income earner is limited by her awareness of precarious balance she has struck with Tim while he performs the housework and child-care. The upshot of their tussling is reflected in Michele's willingness to forego her attempt to influence how well Tim carries out these tasks in favour of simply letting Tim undertake them according to his own standards. This settlement is preferable to her undertaking the domestic work, or continued battles which threaten the durability of relationship.

This outcome is illustrative of some of the complexities that surround Michele's attempts to construct a resistant position within a heterosexual nuclear family. In continuing to engage in paid work after the birth of her child, Michele preserves her direct access to money, and her status in the public arena. Contrary to feminist expectations, these sources of power do not automatically increase Michele's ability to exercise power within her relationship. Rather, as the above analysis demonstrates, Michele's exercise of power in her relationship is negotiated contextually (and to some extent on a day-by day basis) through the matrix of positions that she and Tim occupy. This does not mean that her position as principal income earner does not have a significant impact on these negotiations, just that it is neither all determining nor uniform. For example, Michele appears to have been highly successful in her use of notions of like 'equality' to get Tim to do most of the housework while she takes the responsibility for earning their income. Yet this occurs at the expense of her control over how well these tasks are performed. And, as I shall discuss in more depth in the next section, adherence to certain standards can be important in maintaining a sense of oneself as a competent woman.

## IV

In order to focus on the question of the relationship between cohabitation as marriage resistance and discourses of femininity, I want to critically engage with Rebecca's simultaneous positioning of herself as a resistant and compliant subject within a gendered domestic culture. This dual positioning is made apparent in the following extract:

*Rebecca:* ...And at the moment I do all the housework. It is really against the grain. Two years ago I went on a housework strike and I refused to do any house work at all

*Vivienne:* This was after you had stopped working?

*Rebecca:* But there is no reason that I should have do all the housework. I mean it should be half and half, except that I am home all day and he hasn't got time. And he says, 'Oh well I will leave varsity.'... So at the moment I put up with it, but I am really against doing it all.

A short while later I returned to this theme by asking:

*Vivienne:* Do you feel you have to do the housework because you aren't earning money presently? Or is it just a time thing with Brett at university?

*Rebecca:* Unfortunately I think it is both. It shouldn't be like that. It is a time thing. But if the house is filthy, which ours usually is, people look at the female and think, 'Isn't she dirty. Ooh look at the way she keeps her house.' It is always females. It is never men that are responsible for cleaning houses. It is not their fault if something is not done.

*Vivienne:* But nobody ever says anything.

*Rebecca:* No they don't, but I know. I know. I go to other people's places and think, 'What a dirty woman.' I mean I should know better. But I still do it. I mean the stereotype has been laid out that it is the woman that do the housework and we still think it - You know afterwards, it is not right, but I know that is the way it is.

Like when I went on a housework strike I was constantly embarrassed about it. I had to apologise for the house being filthy not Brett. You know he didn't care. I don't think he actually noticed. ... And eventually I knew it would be me that was going to be doing it anyway. So I gave up my housework strike. It was just wasteful.

In her narration of her varied responses to the issue of housework Rebecca highlights her rebelliousness, even as she acknowledges her susceptibility to the gendered expectation that women do the housework. Her opening statements encapsulate this tension. Rebecca judges her current performance of all of the household chores as an inequitable arrangement that ideally should be rectified, hence her 'housework strike'.

Rebecca imports a concept from the public sphere into the private arena to give her actions meaning. Our understanding of striking is derived from discourses of wage labour. Typically, strikes occur when a dispute (over pay and/or conditions) between employers and employees cannot be settled through negotiations. In an attempt to reconcile the dispute favourably workers may resort to the withdrawal of their labour. Through the use of this tactic workers seek to reposition themselves as more powerful bargaining agents: strikes, and the threat of them, are used as a source of leverage at the negotiating table.

This would seem to be Rebecca's aim. By engaging in a 'housework strike' she seeks to increase her influence in this domain in order that Brett will undertake more of the housework. Her objective is the institution of an alternative bargain, and a subsequent alteration of their domestic practices. The resultant shift would be marked by a fifty-fifty split of the household labour between them irrespective of their activities outside of the home.

What limits Rebecca's potential to sustain the strike, what sends her back to the kitchen sink without a new contract, is her sensitivities to the ongoing prevalence of gendered notions about housework and cleanliness. Aware that the state of their home falls short of socially acceptable standards, Rebecca imagines

that visitors point the finger at her, just as she does to other women when she encounters an untidy abode. In attributing the role of critic to her guests, and providing them with the content of their criticism, Rebecca manages to turn her evaluative voice upon herself. Through this mechanism Rebecca is made into a self-policing subject of a housework panopticon.

As Rebecca represents its construction, the housework panopticon has a gendered population, the cells and the watchtower are both occupied by women. In the domestic arena it is women who exercise disciplinary power, and women who are thereby disciplined. The impact of this disciplinary system is the production of women who are quick to observe the appearance of a home, both their own and other people's. Being positioned within the housework panopticon does not mean that women inevitably maintain clean and tidy homes. As Hochschild notes some women actually pride themselves on keeping a messy house (1989:196-7). Rather, the effect of the housework panopticon is a limitation of women's responses to that of resistance or compliance.

Complete freedom from the expectation that housework is women's work is remarkably difficult for women to attain. The absence of a marriage certificate is not enough to bring about such a dis/location. Even though she cohabits Rebecca remains a target of a housework gaze. Brett, on the other hand, is excluded by virtue of his gender from occupying a similar location. Positioned outside of the housework panopticon Brett, like many other men, does not see whether the house is clean or not (Barrett & McIntosh 1982:63).

Despite a susceptibility to a housework gaze that results in the abandonment of her strike action, Rebecca continues to portray herself as a resistant individual. Her capitulation over the housework does not mean that she has abandoned the notion of fairness and equity altogether. Thus, Rebecca refuses to take on 'his' work in addition to her own:

*Vivienne:* What about outside?

*Rebecca:* I mowed the lawns until the lawn mower broke down. ... And there is nothing else to do. Oh, the painting. He started doing the painting. And I will not paint. He had his time to do the painting, and if he hasn't finished well he will just have to do it now. It is not my job. And I am not going to do it. Once I start painting it will be my job. It will be another job for me to do.

In this scenario, the refusal to take up a paint brush and undertake a task that she could easily perform is symbolic of Rebecca's ongoing resistance to an inequitable division of labour between herself and Brett.

Ironically, Rebecca's construction of herself as a resistant subject is reliant upon gendered notions of household tasks for its effectivity. Rebecca resists the performance of a 'do it yourself' task, a task which is coded masculine. This coding increases the ease with which she can say 'no' because her refusal to paint will not lead to social censure, unlike her housework strike. In fact, it is possible to argue that painting would actually constitute a transgressive act, in that it breaks with conventional ideas about who does what. From the vantage point of a traditional division of labour, Rebecca's actions take on the appearance of compliance. To insist on the veracity of this reading, however, is to attempt to specify the meaning of resistance without reference to the context. While Rebecca's refusal to paint is complicit with the gendered coding of domestic tasks, it is used by her to signify resistance to an unfair workload, to the possibility that she might do everything. Undermining a gendered domestic order is thus secondary to achieving a significant contribution from Brett to the overall demands of running a house.

Rebecca's narrative highlights one of the dangers of Kimball's stipulation that the creation of truly egalitarian relationships requires 'women as well as men to learn new skills' in order lay the foundations for complete task swapping (1983:87-8). In a social context in which men pay lip service to the idea that they should do housework, but still leave most of it to women (Bittman & Lovejoy 1993:306-7; Bittman & Pixley 1997:96-101), task-swapping may well result in

women simply doing a wider range of tasks without any compensatory decrease in the total amount of housework they perform. This is the dilemma that Rebecca seeks to avoid by upholding the idea that painting is 'his' work.

As a symbol of her resistance to gender inequities at home, Rebecca's refusal to paint operates in a similar manner to Nina's refusal to do Nathan's laundry. Both women draw on these symbols to provide supporting evidence, for themselves and for others, of their constitution as resistant identities. Such symbols are of particular importance in the face of contradictions which might suggest an alternative reading of Nina and Rebecca. Their use of such symbols permits Nina and Rebecca to continue to represent themselves in resistant terms even as they engage in compliant practices.

## V

I want in this section, and the subsequent sections, to continue to dwell on the theme of people's dual positioning as resistant and compliant subjects. As Rebecca's narrative illustrates, VanEvery's (1995b:53) expectation of a high level of congruence between an individual's resistance to the gendered conventions of marriage, and their domestic practices is flawed. VanEvery's assumption stems from her adherence to the concept of a unitary subject. Thus she does not note the existence of contradiction within the narratives of the people she interviewed. In contrast, because my work is underpinned by the notion of a subject in process, I anticipated the presence of conflictual subject positions in the stories people told me during the course of this research.

Olivia's narrative forms a case in point. My intention, as I trace her story in the following paragraphs, is to note how she positions herself within various discourses on domestic labour in a manner that gives rise to contradiction. Just as



importantly, I seek to identify the discursive resources she utilises to negotiate the tension created between these subject positions. Through this process I want to further delineate some of the conditions under which somebody who resists becoming a 'wife' finds it permissible to act conservatively in the home. In other words, I am interested in locating mechanisms that facilitate the construction of resistant subjectivities in the midst of compliance; and in pondering whether these mechanisms are similarly available to cohabitantes and married individuals.

Reading the following extract it becomes apparent that Olivia occupies two positions with respect to domestic work:

*Olivia:* ... Like I do most of the cooking. And I am really fussy about what is in the house, and he would buy different brands and stuff.  
He worries about the bills. And I know that may sound really traditional, but the fact is I hate bills. And it is something that he is really good at, that whole adding up thing. I like him doing it.  
But with the kitchen, Steve cooks whenever I don't want to. But I like to cook. I prefer to cook. I am a better cook. Actually, the kitchen is one of my favourite places.

The impact of her location in what might be referred to, following Hochschild's lead, as a transitional discourse on coupledom is the establishment of a division of labour between herself and Steve that is neither fully egalitarian nor fully traditional (Hochschild 1989:15-6).<sup>1</sup> This division of labour accords Olivia responsibility for managing the house, particularly in the area of food and interior design, while Steve looks after their financial undertakings and makes significant contributions to keeping the house clean and tidy.

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<sup>1</sup> In Hochschild's work, women who operate from a transitional perspective seek to combine their orientation towards paid work with their desire to take care of home based needs, and they seek male partners who will help at home yet prioritise their commitment to work outside the home (Hochschild 1989:15-6).

Olivia's second position, derived from feminist critiques of a traditional division of labour, causes her to censure her own conventionality. In defence, Olivia claims that the split that has evolved is based on their respective skills and preferences. Olivia cooks, as she makes clear, because she enjoys this activity – it is something she is good at – and not as a consequence of her gender. In more theoretical terms, Olivia represents herself as someone who exercises agency in this arena. Thus, Olivia asks us not to see her as having capitulated to highly gendered social norms even though she engages in the performance of feminised tasks. Rather, the activities she engages in are the outcome of the exercise of her free will; she has 'chosen' to undertake these chores.

VanEvery observes the pivotal role enjoyment plays in determining who does the cooking and shopping in 'anti-sexist' households (1995b:35). When enjoyment and skill form the basis of apportioning tasks, the determining power of gender recedes from view. Appearances can, however, be deceptive. 'Enjoyment' is (as Van Every notes but doesn't explicate) a constructed concept (1995b:35). At this juncture it seems apt to recall Foucault's contention that one of the most effective ways in which power is exercised is through the construction of our desires (1980:119). Hence, I would argue that gender is a pervasive, if often unacknowledged, influence on what we find pleasurable. As Pepper and Schwartz point out, in a gendered culture 'growing up male and female shapes one's preferences and skills' (1983:325). 'Enjoyment' is not untainted by gender after all. Rather, recourse to 'enjoyment' to divide housework simply permits gender to emerge again as an arbitrating principle.

Although gender acts insidiously to delimit the scope of our choices (Davies 1991:46), its effect does not render the distinction between choice and compulsion entirely null and void. Such a declaration stems from a modernist concept of agency which construes agency in terms of an ability to act outside the social order (Davies 1991:51). Within this framework, a meaningful choice requires

freedom from social constrictions. However, as I have been arguing throughout this thesis, agency within postmodernism assumes an active and ongoing negotiation over how we are constituted as social subjects through discourse (Davies 1991:51).

Bearing this later understanding of agency in mind, I want to explore how Olivia positions herself through the use of a distinction between choice and compulsion (amongst other things), as a woman who exercises power in her relationship with Steve.

*Vivienne:* Are you quite happy with the way it works out?

*Olivia:* I mean sometimes I get fussed about having to come home and cook and stuff like that. But then I mean all I have to say is that 'I can't be bothered cooking tea' and 'Can you do something?' and it will be worked out. Which is really good. Whereas my mother never had that option with my father. There was no way.

But then the other thing is, if I generally cook, I can't expect Steve just to know when to cook. Every now and then he will offer to do it, but generally I will indicate, 'Can you do this?' Or 'Will you cook something?' He generally cooks once a week.

*Vivienne:* So if you are a bit tired of cooking you can say to him – ?

*Olivia:* Yeah, 'Can you cook tea tonight?' 'Yep. Fine.' But he tends to be a pain because he is not very confident at cooking. 'Is this cooked?' Rah. Rah. So I get a bit cross.

Here Olivia contrasts her position favourably with that of her mother's by noting their different relationship to cooking dinner. Whereas cooking nightly was mandatory for her mother (because of her father's refusal to do 'women's stuff'), Olivia's preparation of the evening meal is the outcome of her own volition, and not an imposition that is consequent upon her gender or Steve's preferences. In order to sustain her construction of herself as somebody who cooks dinner on a voluntary basis, the possibility that Olivia can opt out of the performance of this task is vital. Otherwise, the regularity with which she cooks may well lead to the

establishment of a shared expectation that she will cook nightly irrespective of her needs, wants and desires.

Thus, Steve's willingness to cook dinner from time-to-time, especially in response to her requests, is critical to substantiating the existence of Olivia's choice in this matter. In other words, the significance of Steve's cooking lies not just with a single night of reprieve from the stove. More importantly, it symbolises Olivia's ability to exert influence in this arena, unlike her mother. It also signals the possibility the domesticity might be practised differently. If Olivia no longer wanted to cook, Steve would be available to carry out this task on a more regular basis. Steve's cooking mitigates against an assumption that it is 'women's work', thereby challenging the operation of gendered conventions in the home. This break with traditionalism serves to distance Olivia and Steve's relationship from that of her parents. So much so that Olivia is able to contemplate the possibility that she might marry Steve: marriage will not necessitate that she become responsible for all their domestic needs.

The impact of Steve's cooking is, however, undermined in several ways. Firstly, Steve seems somewhat reticent about his involvement in this activity: he does not appear to seek out opportunities to cook over and above those presented to him by Olivia. Neither is he particularly competent. Lacking confidence and some of the necessary skills, Steve frequently seeks out advice from Olivia, so that when he cooks Olivia continues to be involved in this activity. Hochschild believes that 'playing dumb' is a strategy of resistance to a non-gendered division of household chores that is used by men and women alike (1989:201). The effectiveness of this strategy lies with the potential it offers to gain credit for trying, while staving off further requests in the future: under such circumstances, it is often just as easy to do it oneself (Hochschild 1989:201).

Steve's rhetoric around the issue of meal preparation poses an additional constraint on Olivia's ability to opt out of cooking dinner. He delineates the

conditions under which he is willing to replace Olivia as cook for the night. Firstly, Olivia must warn him in the morning and not spring it upon him when they arrive home at night. Secondly, if he is to cook then Olivia must, at a minimum, do the dishes, and preferably make the bed and tidy the bedroom.

As Steve discusses the issue he appropriates for himself a number of positions that foster the legitimacy of his authority in this matter:

*Vivienne:* Are you quite happy with that arrangement?

*Steve:* Oh yeah. Sometimes Olivia says she gets pissed off with doing cooking and that. But then like I say to her, 'Well, okay, you do the dishes and make the bed all the time.' But she won't do that. She just wouldn't make the bed. I guess she doesn't like having it made. I just do because you often go into your room or do something and it is just more — I am just an organised sort of person. I like things that way and it is something I always have done and I always will do, I guess.

*Vivienne:* If Olivia gets pissed off about cooking, do you get pissed off about something that Olivia is not doing or —?

*Steve:* Like I say, if she gives me warning I will do it, but if she springs it on me and 'I don't want to cook rah rah. You cook for me.' I have done all these bits and pieces and I am going to be doing the dishes, 'You can do the dishes.' 'Na.' Then I will say, 'There has got to be a share. You have got to do something,' I feel.

In this quote Steve constructs himself as the standard bearer in their relationship. Steve draws on the discourse of sharing, a discourse commonly used by women to gain larger contributions within the home from their male partners, to insist that Olivia performs a 'fair' share of the domestic load. In this manner, Steve positions himself as being more concerned than Olivia with questions of fairness and justice. Taken together these positions encourage Olivia's adherence to a particular, standardised housework bargain. Specifically, Olivia cooks and Steve does the dishes and tidies the bedroom.

## VI

Until this juncture in the chapter I have largely focused on the domestic arrangements of cohabitees without children with one exception; Michele and Tim. Once children enter a relationship, however, the solutions adopted by cohabitees like Nina to the question of housework become far less viable. As I have already noted, Michele and Tim responded to the issue of who would provide day-to-day child-care through a role-reversal arrangement. But their situation was atypical. The majority of the cohabitees I interviewed who had children did not engage in such obviously unconventional behaviour. Most, like Stephanie, Paula, Karen and Chris, were involved in relatively conventional scenarios: they were the primary care givers of their child/ren. In taking on the role of primary care-givers they appear to be conforming to highly gendered expectations of who will perform this work. Yet to conceive of them as compliant actors would be an oversimplification. In an effort to retain the complexity of their negotiations in this arena I want to pay attention to ways in which they retained a sense of themselves as resistant actors. Consequently, this section explores the negotiations in which Stephanie, Paula, Karen and Chris are engaged over the issue of child-care and housework, and the symbolic markers that they drew on to signify their resistance, non-conformity and difference.

Before I examine these issues in detail I want to briefly provide some pertinent background information. Paula and Stephanie were each the mothers of one pre-school aged child, although Paula was pregnant with her second child. Chris had two sons aged six and four. Karen also had two children of the same age, and was expecting her third. Stephanie and Paula's partners worked full-time. Karen and David received the unemployment benefit. David, however, worked two to three mornings a week at the local Playcentre. In a similar vein, Chris and Duncan were recipients of the unemployment benefit which supplemented the

earnings they derived from Duncan's business and Chris's part-time job. Chris and Duncan each worked about 25 hours a week. Both Paula and Karen weren't in any form of paid work at the time of the interview because of their pregnancies. Paula had, however, worked part-time for about a year when Dot was three months old, and maintained contact with her previous place of employment. Karen intended to return to her part-time job as soon as possible after the birth of her child. Stephanie was currently in part-time paid employment. This represented a reduction from the full-time work Stephanie had previously undertaken.

My entry point into this discussion is a consideration of Paula's reflections on how she and Jonathon arrived at their decision about child-care. What is interesting to note at the outset is her entertainment of the possibility of an alternative arrangement: how they would respond to the need for child-care was a question that was actually posed and not an assumed given. Asked to contemplate the basis of their current division of labour, which sees Paula at home looking after Dot and Jonathon working nine-five, Paula replied:

I didn't want to get into the situation where I would be at home with the children and Jonathon would be out working earning the money. But as it works out at the moment it is the most feasible thing because he earns a lot more money than I could earn, and the possibility of him working part-time in the near future is very foreseeable. That is the ideal for both of us, to both be at home a lot and work a little. ... So we sort of have plans to do that in the future.

In this extract, Paula makes explicit her rejection of gendered notions of who stays home and who goes out to work, even as she has ended up conforming to this pattern. Paula's decision to stay at home with her daughter does not represent her investment in securing a gendered order, rather the decision is a practical response to the demands she and Jonathon faced with the birth of Dot. Equating acting conservatively with conservatism would be wrong in this instance. Instead Paula's

conservative behaviour actually signifies her pragmatism. Constructing herself through the discourse of pragmatism, Paula can be viewed as a strategic actor who draws on the rationale provided within this discourse to reconcile the conflicting demands of mothering and anti-traditionalism.

To further distinguish herself from women who act conservatively for conservative reasons, Paula indicates the temporary character of the settlement she and Jonathon have reached over child-care. By planning a non-traditional future for herself, Paula displaces resistance, as an overtly demonstrable behaviour, onto future time. The future is thereby colonised to give present actions a different inflection: a non-traditional future symbolises her ongoing resistance in the midst of outward conformity to the norms of gendered child-care practices.

As Paula continues to reflect on her involvement in the care of Dot, the construction of child-care as an activity that both Paula and Jonathon prefer over work is made clear:

*Paula:* ...I quite like looking after my child. I find it interesting and almost, not exactly stimulating, but it can be. You know it is quite an interesting thing to do and I really like it. But I also know that Jonathon would get quite a lot out of it too and sharing it would be really good. And it would be good for the children as well.

Child-care, within this formulation, is a highly prized and desirable activity performed by the person whose access to financial resources is most limited. It is not automatically and exclusively women's work. Neither is paid work restricted to men. Paid work is a necessary evil, something that must be done by one or other partner in order to meet their financial needs. From this perspective paid employment loses some of its prestige, and becomes something of a short straw. Paula's construction of these activities implies their re-evaluation. It contests popularised feminisms that highlight the financial losses women bear as a result of



their child-caring duties, yet hardly mention the non-monetary rewards that offset such losses.

Despite her enthusiasm for child-care, Paula does not want to assume total and absolute care of Dot. This became evident as she talked about aspects of her parents' relationship that she did not want to replicate:

*Paula:* ...And the obvious thing was the total care-giving role that my mother had for the children. When we were young it was our mother who totally did everything for us.

I mean Dad was always working. I don't remember him as a figure at all in my upbringing until he started to doing things like the dishes we were a lot older.... But at the time when my Mother really needed the help he wasn't there.

So that is a really big thing. ... It is quite fundamental to my relationship now.

*Vivienne:* In what ways?

*Paula:* Well I would never live with someone who didn't want to help me look after the children we had. That would be a situation that I would just not stay in.

Help with child-care serves as the mark of contrast between the situation Paula finds herself in and that of her mother's. In the absence of such help, Paula's circumstances would be equally unenviable and equally oppressive.

Chris, Stephanie and Karen also denote the more egalitarian nature of their relationships through recourse to their partners' involvement in child-care. Of particular significance is the time out they gain as a consequence of Duncan, Craig and David's role as supplementary care-givers. In other words, sharing child-care in a manner which permits Chris, Stephanie and Karen to have time free from the obligations and demands of children constitutes the symbol of a non-oppressive relationship. This point is made explicit in the following extract taken from my interview with Stephanie:

*Vivienne:* What characterises an equal relationship for you?

*Stephanie:* I think just an appreciation for what each other does.

*Vivienne:* So it doesn't actually mean that Craig has to do the cooking and cleaning?

*Stephanie:* No. He doesn't cook actually which is a continual bone of contention. But I expect him to look after Alex as much as I do. I expect some time out. Just as he wants to play rugby then I expect him to take Alex for an afternoon and give me some time to do something I want to do.

Stephanie's statements suggest that in the post-children era of a relationship, child-care takes on greater significance than cooking or cleaning as an indicator of anti-traditionalism.

But what happens when both partners want 'time out' at the same time? Chris and Duncan devised a system for resolving this issue that avoided assigning responsibility for child-care along gendered lines. Chris outlines how it works below:

*Chris:* ... And both of us are quite involved, or were involved in a lot of committees so we had a lot of meetings and if they coincided we would, well there used to be a race to the calendar first.

*Vivienne:* So, who didn't have to look after the kids?

*Chris:* Yes, or who had to organise a baby sitter was the way it was. And so he would say, 'Oh look I have got this meeting.' 'Well you didn't have it on the calendar. I am out so you have to do it.' ...

Although I guess in some ways if I hadn't pushed it it could have been- Again it would be very easy for Duncan to sit back and to let me- Like I would have organised the baby-sitter and so-on. If we both had a meeting it would have been up to me. But um he, like I used to work on a Saturday morning and then he got a job on Saturday mornings so he organised the baby-sitter to look after the children and so-on like that. And so in that way it works out quite fairly.

Even when the care of their children is temporarily left with another, Chris's enforcement of the rules of this system actively positions Duncan as somebody who shares responsibility with her for meeting the needs of their children. It symbolises Chris's abdication from the role of primary care-giver (although she still does more child-care than Duncan). Duncan is thus cast as much more than Chris's helper. He is a 'co-parent'.

Comparing their partners' involvement in child-care with that of other fathers, several of the women I interviewed spontaneously expressed their good fortune. They felt grateful towards their partners for the role they played in the lives of their children:<sup>2</sup>

*Karen:* ...from the time Jake was old enough to go away without me David would take him away for walks so that I could have a rest or whatever. David is very good in that way. I have been lucky. There are lots of women I know whose partners won't do that, or don't do that without being asked.

*Vivienne:* They won't pick up on child-care?

*Karen:* No. They don't see child-care as a necessary part of their daily activity. I think David really enjoys it too which really helps.

Expressions of gratitude occur within a gendered domestic context, such that a person's uptake of a task that is 'normally' assigned to the opposite gender is more likely to inspire acknowledgment (Ferree 1990:876). It is exceptions to the rule that are remarked upon, rather than those instances that conform to social and cultural expectations. Thus, men's performance of child-care tends to be worthy of note. In many ways then, expressions of gratitude are derived from, and reinforce, gendered notions of who should undertake which tasks at home.

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<sup>2</sup> I cannot find any record of men expressing a similar feeling.

Karen's extract points to the existence of another factor, the 'going rate', within what Hochschild calls 'the economy of gratitude' (1989:18 & 51). Karen assesses David's 'going rate' at a high level because she prizes his contribution to child-care and has reason to believe that he undertakes more child-care than other men in similar circumstances. In the absence of any of these factors an expression of appreciation may not be forthcoming. For example, if Karen did not to attach value to David's involvement in child-care she may not welcome this activity; it may be construed as an intrusion rather than a supportive act (see Hochschild 1989:51). In which case an expression of gratitude is unlikely to follow. Yet its absence may be the cause of discontent and resentment (Hochschild 1989:51-2).<sup>3</sup>

The use by these women of male involvement with child-care, over and above contributions to household tasks, to signify a rupture with traditionalism is ironic because it occurs at the very moment within the relationship when women tend to take on more of the domestic load. Yet contributions in the area of child-care can be used to offset the idea that these tasks are assigned on the basis of gender, just as previous domestic work patterns contribute to a sense of the voluntary character of current arrangements:

*Paula:* ...Saturday mornings used to be our cleaning day when we didn't have a child. ... Now it is the other way around. Weekends are really non sort of domestic because Jonathon wants to spend as much time as possible with Dot. So he tends to take her out or whatever or we all go out together to the beach for the day . So the week is really the time that I do all the housework. I mean I don't do that much compared to other women that I talk to.

In this quote, Paula describes another outcome of valorising child-care. By prioritising 'fathering', Paula is obliged to support Jonathon's desire to spend time at the weekend with his daughter Dot. But Jonathon's involvement with Dot

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<sup>3</sup> See my discussion of Michele earlier in this chapter.

makes him unavailable for household chores. Paula's commitment to the provision of 'family time' means that she does not contest this. Instead Paula organises her schedule so that she undertakes these tasks during the week. Ordered on the basis of time, availability, and family needs, the distribution of housework is not seen to be attributable to gender. The significance of this claim lies in the possibility it affords for establishing alternative allocations should changes in availability occur. In other words, it contributes to a sense that housework is not inevitably and always women's work. Rather, who does what at home is contingent on a number of factors, some of which are outlined above.

By constructing themselves as the bearers of choice in the domestic domain Paula, Stephanie, Chris and Karen define their intimate relationships with men in egalitarian terms. Their partners have not pressurised them to become the major care-giver, nor have they taken on this role by virtue of their gender. How then are we to understand their uptake of the position of primary parent? Should women who voluntarily decrease their involvement with paid work in order to stay at home with their children be read as compliant actors? The answer must surely be, 'not always'. In the case of these women their decision to be centrally involved in the care of their children represents a juggling of multiple needs and desires: for instance, the need to provide child-care in an affordable manner; the need to obtain an adequate income for the 'family'; the desire to be a 'good mother'; the desire to resist conventional family forms. Responding to these multiple and potentially conflicting agendas, Paula, Stephanie, Chris and Karen had become more orientated towards home than their male partners. The difference between these women and conservative women who engage in very similar practices is one of motive: they desire to be unconventional. Their non-conventionality is marked through practices which facilitate the active parenting of male partners, leading to the strategic decentring of their place within the area of child-care.

## VI

Before I draw this chapter to a close I want to give consideration to Jonathon's discussion of his domestic life. My choice of Jonathon is based on his self-reflexivity and the exposure within his talk of some of the contradictory consequences of new forms of masculinity that are more embracing of qualities and tasks that are traditionally marked out as feminine. A sole focus on Jonathon is not supposed to convey that he represents the quintessential man who cohabits. Neither is he necessarily atypical. My intention is to use Jonathon's comments to raise issues for consideration: what are the consequences of certain discursive constructions of our/selves for gender relations in the home? And what understandings of the self help us to make sense of division of domestic labour?

I want to begin my engagement with Jonathon by looking at his construction of himself as a modern androgynous man who is fully competent in the performance of both masculinised and feminised tasks. Jonathon establishes the basis for this claim in the following extract as he contrasts Paula's narrower range of skills with his own broadly based involvement in their lives:

*Jonathon:* ...There is a funny kind of imbalance in our relationship I think because I can do more things than she can. We can both cook, but only I can change a spark plug. We can both work in the garden, but it would take her a very long time to remove a rotten weatherboard from the side of the house and find one that fitted and put it back in, prime it and paint it. I mean she would probably be equal to the task, but it would take a while.

So there is a domain of things that we both do and enjoy. Like going for a walk or reading in the garden or playing with Dot. And there is a domain of things which only I can do. Either because only I have the skills or only I have the inclination to do those things. And a much smaller domain of things which Paula alone can do.

I am not meaning to say that I am more multiply talented or something. It just seems to be the way it works in practice. It is a funny sort of imbalance. I mean she doesn't have a career to compete with my career. She has an accountancy degree, but doesn't want to be an accountant. And she isn't quite sure what she wants to do with that qualification. It is not like there is something spurring her on so that she might say to me, 'Hang on. You are having your go at developing your career but I need to do the same with mine at some stage.'

Comfortable in both the public arena of paid work and the private domain of domesticity, Jonathon constitutes himself as the person who is able to do the widest range of tasks on which the household depends. Construed through this lens, Paula comes off a poor second: she only performs the feminised tasks of her mother's generation. Paula's competencies do not match Jonathon's. She is not an androgynous figure who is orientated, in equal measures, to home and work. Nor is she inclined towards the performance of fix-it jobs on either the car or the house.

One of the upshots of this comparison is that it undermines the specificity and value of the skills Paula uses on an everyday basis. The status Paula might have derived from being recognised as a domestic expert within a complementary partnership is diminished by Jonathon's claim to share this expertise. New versions of masculinity (that Jonathon embodies) often supplement the power of 'breadwinning' with an encroachment into the power conventionally granted to women as a result of their (formerly) exclusive domestic knowledge. As Jonathon notes, this creates an imbalance because complementarity is lost.

A pivotal element of Jonathon's representation of his relationship with Paula is his assertion that he performs feminised tasks to an acceptable standard. While conceding that Paula might be able to undertake masculinised tasks, albeit more awkwardly, Jonathon is unwilling to acknowledge that his shortcomings are similarly significant. To do so would be to threaten his construction of himself as

the equal of Paula within the sphere of domestic work. Although his actual participation in tasks like child-care is undeniable, the question of how well he performs them is open to contestation. Thus, the adequacy with which tasks are performed becomes a highly politicised site. This was made evident during his discussion of his involvement in the care of his daughter:

*Jonathon:* ...What I find is that when all three of us are together Dot will go to Paula with every request. And when it comes round to lunch time Paula will prepare a meal before I've even had a chance to decide what to feed Dot. Or in the morning when Dot is in her pyjamas I will get some clothes out of Dot's cupboard to put on, but because Paula is used to dressing her Paula will say, 'Don't put that on. It doesn't go with such and such.' Or, 'It is not warm enough.' Or whatever. Those things that Paula has down to a routine I have to learn or relearn.

So when we are all together, even though we set out to try and do equal amounts of parenting it is a matter of course that Paula ends up doing most of it. Either because Dot expresses that preference, 'Mummy do it.' Or the other side of it is that Paula feels that there are certain things to do with caring for Dot, like what to feed her and how to dress her, that she knows better than I do because she is more used to doing it.

But on the days that Paula has gone away, Dot and I get on like clockwork. I have no problems feeding her, dressing her and putting her to bed. I do everything my own way. And probably if Paula was a fly on the wall she would be a bit horrified. I'm a little bit more anarchic than Paula. I can remember days when I've had Dot and have realised that it is three o'clock and no wonder she is so scratchy because it is three hours past her sleep-time. But we get there in the end.

Forestalling a negative appraisal of his parenting, Jonathon suggests that his effectiveness in this area is compromised by Dot's preference for Paula, and Paula's



unwillingness to relinquish her centralised role in the care of Dot when Jonathon is present. Further to this, Jonathon argues that his different handling of Dot's care should not be interpreted as a mark of his deficiencies as a parent. Rather, it is merely indicative of his more haphazard approach that is neither intrinsically better or worse than Paula's style.

Framed in this manner, the positions Paula adopts must of necessity be complex. Her interests lie in supporting Jonathon's involvement in child-care so that she can both have a break from looking after Dot and construe herself as a woman in a modern relationship that affords her options. Yet in promoting Jonathon's involvement she is at risk of being undervalued by him because she no longer has anything special to offer. This then is her quandary.

Jonathon's life is similarly characterised by contradiction and complexity. His values would seem to dictate an unconventional lifestyle, but in actuality his relationship to Paula conforms to a relatively conventional script. Jonathon didn't assume that he would be the breadwinner, yet this is what he has found himself doing. While Jonathon works nine-five to earn an income sufficient to support himself, Paula and Dot, Paula spends most of her time at home attending the needs of their child:

*Jonathon:* ...And I had this idea of myself being really different. For a while I used to think, 'Wow, wouldn't it be great to be a house-husband!' Not because it actually appealed on its own right, but because it was so different. I could say to people 'I'm a house-husband and not an architect,' or whatever. And Paula, I guess, had the same tendency. And it is interesting to see that we have ended up with the male partner working during the day and the female partner staying home and keeping house and raising the child. I mean on the surface ours is a very traditional set-up. The house, the car, the dog, the cat, the child, the job, and the mortgage. So superficially it looks the same as a lot of other people's relationships and lives. But I hope that it is not.

Operating on the basis of the unitary and coherent subject of modernism, writers like Hochschild (1989), Bittman and Lovejoy (1993), and even Van Every (1995a, 1995b) have anticipated that people's domestic practices will mirror their stated beliefs and understandings. Fulfilling this expectation, Jonathon should have become a 'house-husband'. However, like many of the people that feature in their respective research samples, Jonathon's domestic practices diverge from his stated preferences.

Posed as a problem Hochschild (1989), and Bittman and Lovejoy (1993), have each developed conceptual schema that account for the existence of this discrepancy. For instance, Bittman and Lovejoy devised the notion of 'pseudo-mutuality' which they define as the maintenance of a sense of reciprocity through denying or concealing evidence of non-mutuality (1993:302). Hochschild explains the existence of a contradiction between beliefs and actions in terms of a clash between people's 'surface' and 'deep' ideologies (1989:14-6). Surface ideological allegiances are indicative of what people think they *should* want, whereas their deep ideological affiliations reveal what they *really* want (Hochschild 1989:14-6). Constructing the significance of these differing allegiances in this manner, Hochschild apportions greater veracity to 'deep ideologies'. These convey the truth of a person's orientation towards home and work. Taking cognisance of Hochschild's approach, Jonathon becomes a far more conservative actor than he is either willing to acknowledge or to have us believe.

In contrast, I want to offer an explanation for the presence of contradiction in Jonathon's life that draws upon postmodern understandings of the subject. Released from the expectation that people will be coherent and unified actors, I do not have to impose a singular truth on Jonathon. His investment in practices that deviate from his proclaimed beliefs does not render his beliefs suspect. As a multiply located subject Jonathon attempts to stitch a life together that takes into account the conflicting agendas established by his locations. Jonathon's interest in

living unconventionally needs to be balanced against his desire to fully realise the potential afforded by his educational attainments, the demands Paula and he face as a consequence of having a child, Paula's ability to earn enough money to support both of them, their ideas about how to raise children, and so on.

The circumstances in which Jonathon finds himself play a significant role in how he manages this juggling act. This is an important point. Under different circumstances Jonathon's solution may well have been very different. For instance, had Jonathon only just begun his studies, or if Paula had pursued her involvement in accountancy in a more conventional manner, Jonathon might have opted to stay at home to look after Dot while Paula engaged in full-time paid work. However, the realities of their situation at the time of Paula's pregnancy were somewhat different: he was able to earn a larger income than Paula, and he was at a crucial stage in his professional career. These circumstances meant that Jonathon and Paula's conventional apportionment of paid work and child-care was a 'logical choice', the 'only thing to do'.

Given this perspective it is not necessary to describe Jonathon as a conventional actor hiding behind a thin veneer of unconventionality. Jonathon is simultaneously conventional and unconventional. It is possible to recognise his unconventionality even as it is acknowledged that he is constrained to act in conventional ways. Some of these constraints stem from the social context, others are the outcome his choice of Paula as his intimate partner and Paula's subject positionings, and still others originate in his constitution within other discourses. Noting this latter source of constriction I am reminded of Davies' comment:

Choices are understood as more akin to 'forced choices', since the subject's positioning within particular discourses makes the 'chosen' line of action the only possible action, not because there are no other lines of action but because one has been subjectively constituted through one's placement within that discourse to *want* that line of action.

(1991:46, emphasis in the original)

Living together is highly salient act for Jonathon. Cohabitation becomes the definitive symbol of Jonathon's desire to be unconventional, allowing him to take on more conventional behaviours in other aspects of his life. Jonathon utilises cohabitation to maintain his self-representation as an unconventional actor. Marriage, in this context, poses a challenge to this self-representation. As a married man, Jonathon's ability to construct himself in unconventional terms would be severely limited because of the capacity to read marriage as a symbol of the abandonment of the project of resistance.

Responding to my prompt for him to elaborate on how his unorthodoxy sits with his current domestic arrangements, Jonathon makes the following insightful observations:

*Jonathon:* ...And then I started to think, 'Well I shouldn't be rejecting something at that level just because it is orthodox.' I should reject it if there is something wrong with it. But if I am rejecting it because it is ordinary all that is saying is that I am a person who wants to be perceived by the outside world as being out of the ordinary. You know I am just showing off, 'Look at me I am a "house-husband"!'. Because part of me would like to do that. 'Oh my "wife" works. I look after the baby.' That sort of thing. 'We are different.'

I don't know. Before I was attached to anybody I always thought that I would like the relationship that I had to be different from the ones that I saw around me, especially my parents' marriage. I wanted whatever my relationship was to be different from theirs, to have a bit more latitude or something.

In this extract, Jonathon begins to deconstruct the un/orthodox (or the un/conventional) binary and its alignment with 'good' and 'bad'. An automatic reading of orthodoxy in pejorative terms and the presumption that unconventionality is inevitably superior is discounted. In so doing, Jonathon engages in a critique of his own anti-traditionalism. He asks us to consider

whether an interest in being different from the norm is a venture pursued solely to permit a favourable representation of the self. 'Difference' is drawn upon to construct a hierarchy of identities in which greater value is invariably attached to unconventionality. Perhaps because he is now placed at a disadvantage, Jonathon seeks to intervene in this ordering of identities by pointing to the superficiality of appeals to difference as a prop to enhance personal status.

In order to engage in this level of self-reflection Jonathon moves betwixt and between his locations within conventional and unconventional discourses. As a consequence, the preceding extract is littered with constructions of the social arena from both vantage points. Speaking as an unconventional subject he commends difference and derides orthodoxy. When he gives voice to his conventionality he defends this orientation and points to the weaknesses of unconventionality. Jonathon's self-reflections illustrate the interactive possibilities of our multiple positionings and shows how multiplicity sets the stage for resistance and agency:

Agency is never freedom from [the] discursive constitution of [the] self but the capacity to recognise that constitution and to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted.

(Davies 1991:51)

## WHAT HAS LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

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At the heart of this thesis is a central question: how might women create egalitarian relationships with men in domestic settings? Might the answer to this problem lie with cohabitation, an increasingly popular alternative to marriage? Pondering this issue, the work laid out in my previous chapters pays critical attention to some of the social, domestic and financial identities adopted by cohabitees as they attempt to craft relationships different in character from conventional marriages. In establishing this as the scope of my research, I was largely influenced by the template provided in the work of feminist sociologists studying contemporary marital relations (Burns 1986; Blumberg & Coleman 1989; Komter 1989; O'Connor 1991; Ross 1991). Primarily concerned with what Smart (1996a:235) terms the lifestyle aspects of heterosexuality, this template generally overlooks the emotional and sexual elements of heterosexual relationships.

This is not to say that the sexual dimensions of heterosexuality have been neglected within feminist literature; quite the contrary. However, there is a relatively clear division, that is only beginning to be rectified (see for example, VanEvery 1996a, 1996b), between the literature that focuses on heterosexuality as a sexual practice and a privileged social institution, and writings that attend to the

issues that arise when love, passion and physical attraction are followed by decisions to construct a domestic life in a particular household. Not only does this fragmentation foster an intellectual environment in which a legitimate charge can be made against the heterosexism of most 'family' sociology (VanEvery 1996a:38, 1996b:40), but it also means that studies of marital relations only provide their readers with partial insights into the highly complex terrain of personal relationships.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the shortcomings of sociological research into personal relationships can be attributed to the way in which the discipline of sociology has been defined (Duncombe & Marsden 1993:222-3; Jackson 1993a:201-2). Historically sociologists have largely concerned themselves with the machinations of the 'public' sphere, jettisoning as 'too personal' many of the questions that stem from a consideration of the 'private' domain. Love and other emotions fall within the gambit of the personal. Consequently, they have been traditionally rejected as suitable topics for sociological research. Yet as Jackson convincingly argues (in an article that was published well after I began this research), love (like sexuality) is a social phenomenon, and hence its meanings are specific to time and place (1993a:201-202, 207 & 212; see also Jackson 1995a:51; Duncombe & Marsden 1995b:249).

Appearing at the same time as my own analysis of my interview material had made me increasingly convinced of the need to attend to the emotional and sexual components of relationships, the emerging literature on the emotional terrain of heterosexual relationships confirmed the importance of the trajectory I want to take in this chapter. Although often treated as an invisible (but inherent) backdrop to intimate relationships, love forms a crucial site of negotiation. Love

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<sup>1</sup> I use 'marital' advisedly here since in the vast majority of sociological research the focus is on married couples.

and power are not dichotomous categories (Meyer 1991:23). Instead love is a domain through which power is exercised:

The statement: 'I love you' is not a factual observation. It is an invitation to define or redefine the content of the relationship. Depending on the answer ('I know you do', '...ahm, I'm very fond of you my dear'... or, simply, 'I love you') different scenarios ensue, with widely disparate emotional content and varying power differentials.

(Meyer 1991:40-1)

Hollway contends that the subjectivities people adopt within this discursive arena are prompted by their desire to 'gain enough power in relation to the other to protect their vulnerable selves' (Hollway 1989:90). Considered from this perspective, the choice of relational discourse (together with its attendant subjectivities) is both reflective of the exercise of power, and laden with implications for its future exercise.

This chapter concentrates on the negotiations that took place amongst some of the cohabitantes with whom I spoke over identity, relational form and its emotional significations. These are, however, not the only sites burdened with emotional consequences. Other arenas, such as the distribution of housework, financial arrangements, and of course sexual relations, are frequently emotionally charged. Sometimes emotional issues are actually negotiated via these arenas. At other times, transactions within these arenas act as symbolic markers within the domain of love and romance. Hence, performing household chores may be read as a sign of love and care (Hochschild 1989:49 & 188).

In the light of my own research, I would argue that an in-depth understanding of the complex nature of domestic coupledness requires that more attention be paid to the emotional realm, including how couples manage conflict. It is important to examine the relationship between material practices, like money management, and the emotional dimensions of relationships (see Duncombe &



Marsden 1993:225). To achieve this objective, future research needs to be orientated towards finding the meanings – in emotional terms – that women and men attribute to the positions they each adopt in these supposedly ‘non-emotional’ arenas. This research would make it possible to identify how emotional subjectivities are discursively constructed, and hence how gendered power relations are constituted in ways that might serve to consolidate or destabilise configurations of power within a heterosexual relationship.

In putting love and, to a lesser extent, sex on the agenda, I am not arguing for the ultimate insignificance of either cohabitation or marriage in favour of several more fundamental areas of concern. Instead, I am suggesting that a comprehensive approach to the question that I posed at the outset of this chapter requires the interrogation of a range of different sites that includes the social identities adopted by cohabitees and married couples, the domestic practices they engage in, as well as the (gendered) identities produced within discourses about love and heterosexual sex. Extending the breadth of scrutiny in this manner enables a grappling with the complexity of relationships: at the same time it paves the way for posing new questions for future research and new avenues for feminist initiatives geared towards producing a feminist heterosexuality.

The aim of this chapter is to explore some of this complexity. Because my research project was not conceptualised along these lines, access to salient interview material is less than ideal. Some of the depth and detail that characterises previous chapters is, therefore, missing. This chapter, however, is motivated by a desire to raise questions and suggest avenues for future research, rather than an attempt to provide answers.

Having said this, I nevertheless want to reflect on what some of the cohabitees who participated in this study have to say about the emotional fabric of their lives. What relationship do these cohabitees have to the discourse of romantic love? As Jackson sagely quips:

It is much easier to refuse to participate in romantic rituals, to resist pressures towards conventional marriage, to be cynical about 'happy ever after' endings than it is to avoid falling in love.

(1993a:209)

To what extent do these cohabitees demonstrate compliance in, or resistance to, the discourse of romantic love? Are love and sexual relations discursively connected? And if so, how and for whom?

Driven by these questions this chapter serves two purposes. It furthers our understanding of the implications of the way in which cohabitees have constructed their relationships; and it adds substance to the growing literature on the complexity of heterosexual coupledness. For the emotional terrain is, as several authors have pointed out, a frontier zone, a site undergoing current transformation (Duncombe & Marsden 1993:237, 1995a:165; see also Giddens 1992).

## I

As people living within a western cultural tradition, we are all familiar with the classical plot of romantic love. The story line (almost always about heterosexual love) has been narrated to us, in a variety of guises, from fairy tales to Shakespearean dramas, countless times. Not only is the romantic script widely known, it also serves as the basis for organising our own stories of past, present and future relationships (Stacey & Pearce 1995:15; see also Jackson 1993a:212-3; Duncombe & Marsden 1995b:238). The narrative of romantic love offers us the necessary signposts for recognising when we are in love, and whether the object of our desire reciprocates this love (Giddens 1992:44; Duncombe & Marsden 1995b:249; Jackson 1995a:51-2). It is, therefore, through the discourse of romantic love that we can discern the 'truth' of these affairs of the heart.

Quintessentially, the romantic plot is driven by the quest for a bond of love that is strong enough to overcome the obstacles that inevitably stand in the way of the lovers' instantaneous union: true love conquers all (Stacey & Pearce 1995:15-6). The romantic narrative ends, if it ends happily (and many a tale of love ends in woe), when the couple, having overcome all sources of opposition, openly declares undying love for each other as they contemplate 'happily-ever-after'.

In a contemporary social setting, this declaration often serves as the forerunner to marriage (Jackson 1993b:42). 'Love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage.' Thus, marriage — in general terms a long-term monogamous relationship that incorporates sharing a home, financial resources and the expectation of child-rearing — is the ending towards which the romantic quest journeys (Jackson 1993b:42; VanEvery 1995b:39).

At least that is if you are heterosexual. Lesbian and gay couples are generally barred from marrying. For them/us, love cannot spell marriage. Positioned outside of marital discourse, homosexual couples are denied access to the culturally recognised way of celebrating the achievement of a romantic love bond. Unable to act out the final episode in the romantic narrative, homosexual love is marginalised within the discourse of romance. Lacking official recognition, the extent to which homosexual love affairs exist is concealed from widespread public knowledge. Consequently, access to this form of giving and receiving love is circumscribed.

Wedded to marriage, love has been the subject of much feminist criticism (see for example, Comer 1974; de Beauvoir [1949] 1972; Firestone 1972). Love, it has been argued, is simply the bait that traps women in relations of domestic servitude: 'It starts when you sink into his arms and ends with your arms in his sink' (Jackson 1993a:204; Segal 1994:242). Like religion, love is an opiate that tranquillises, preventing women from realising their own oppression (de Beauvoir 1972:653).

What is perhaps even more salient than such pronouncements is the recognition that gender is inscribed through the romantic narrative. The heterosexualised script of romance links activity with masculinity and passivity (or receptivity) with femininity. Classically, staging the romance is assigned to men (Hunter 1992:373; Duncombe & Marsden 1995b:242; Stacey & Pearce 1995:20). It is men who are positioned as the initiators, and men who are credited with steering the course of the romantic encounter towards its conclusion, however that might be defined. The realities of courting are unquestionably more varied than this schematic description suggests. Nevertheless, such depictions operate to establish gendered expectations against which real life romances are lived out (Hunter 1992:373-4; see also Duncombe & Marsden 1995b:239-43; Stacey & Pearce 1995:36).

The discourse of romantic love devolves along gendered lines in another respect. The erotic element of romance is typically consigned to the masculine while its emotional counterpart is thought of as a feminine domain (Duncombe & Marsden 1995b:240 & 243; Jackson 1993a:209 & 214, 1995a:52; Stacey & Pearce 1995: 20-21). Considered from this angle, it is assumed that men pursue romance in order to establish a sexual connection; it is sex that is of primary importance to them. Women, it is believed, subordinate the sexual to a relational agenda (Giddens 1992:50; Hunter 1992:372 & 380).

These readings are corroborated by Hollway's pioneering work on the discourses of heterosexual sex (1984, 1989; see also Gilfoyle et al. 1992; Wight 1996). The gender differentiated discourses of heterosex offer men the possibility of becoming subjects within the 'permissive' discourse (Hollway 1989:55), the 'predatory' discourse (Wight 1996:154), and the 'pseudo-reciprocal gift' discourse (Gilfoyle et al. 1992:217): except for the 'permissive' discourse, women are positioned as objects within these discourses. In all of these discourses, sex is pursued by men, albeit for different reasons, as an end in-and-of-itself. Through these discourses sex is disconnected from romantic love.

The subject positions for women, on the other hand, are derived from the 'permissive' discourse, or more typically from the 'have/hold' discourse (Hollway 1989:55; see also Wight 1996:159). Within the 'have/hold' discourse sexuality is tied to the establishment of a relationship: sexual intimacy and romantic love imply each other (Shrage 1994:36 & 38). Taking up a position within the 'have/hold' discourse, women experience their feelings of sexual attraction for their lovers as 'love' and hence inscribe their relationships within the romantic script (see Thompson, cited Giddens 1992: 50).

Associated with this division is an apparent gendered susceptibility to romance (Giddens 1992:2; Duncombe & Marsden 1993:233; Jackson 1993a:203-4, 209). It is believed that women are highly receptive to romantic overtures given that they/we are enjoined to find personal fulfilment and satisfaction in love and relationships (Jackson 1993a:205; Duncombe & Marsden 1995b:249). Men, on the other hand, stereotypically resist the expression of feelings being in love seems to require in order to avoid entrapment (Jackson 1993a:214; Duncombe & Marsden 1995b:239) and possible challenges that this might pose to their claims to be masculine subjects. After all, 'heterosexuality [is] the exclusive province of the masculine male' (Hunter 1992:371).

Despite widespread familiarity with these insights, the power of love to seduce remains extraordinary. Statements like 'Everybody needs to love and be loved' (Ramazanoglu 1992:446) are commonplace, suggesting that the discourse of love encompasses everybody in its breadth and constitutes us all as desiring subjects. It is hardly surprising that although the discourse of romance is considered politically unsound, many heterosexual feminists find its pull irresistible (Gill & Walker 1992:452). As Stacey and Pearce observe, 'Neither intellectual or political scepticism seems to save anyone — feminists included — from succumbing to its snares' (1995:12; see also Jackson 1993a:209, 1995a:56).

Given such admissions, it seems important to acknowledge the contradictions of love. Romantic love offers a pathway to personal validation, confirming them/us as uniquely special (Giddens 1992:45; Duncombe & Marsden 1993:227; Jackson 1993a:205). They/We become the 'only one', adored and held in safe arms, provided with a sanctuary from the rigours of the world beyond the lover's dyad (see Hollway 1993:414; also Jackson 1993a:210). Daily traumas, of thesis completion for example, may be evaded or radically transfigured by love. Love holds out the possibility of transforming oneself and the other (Jackson 1993a:212; Stacey & Pearce 1995:18). Through a woman's love frogs will be turned into princes, recalcitrant heroes made into sensitive and loving brutes (Giddens 1992:46; Jackson 1993a:212, 1993b:43, 1995:53; Stacey & Pearce 1995:18). Endowed with this power it is little wonder that women are powerfully attracted to love: 'It is perhaps the only way in which women can hope to have power over men' (Jackson 1993a:212).

## II

The previous section provides a skeletal overview of the romantic narrative together with some preliminary reflections on its gendered effects.<sup>2</sup> In this section I want to contemplate the relationship of cohabitation to romance. In pursuing this theme, I shall consider several ways of reading cohabitation from the perspective of the romantic narrative. I also want to examine how the cohabitees with whom I spoke engaged with — embraced, utilised and resisted — the various meanings attributed to cohabitation, marriage and love in order to negotiate the emotional terrain of their relationships. Through the contemplation of this material I will be

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<sup>2</sup> For more detailed discussion of the issues raised see Jackson (1993a, 1995a); Stacey & Pearce (1995) and other contributions to *Romance Revisited*.

able to offer some insights into the possibilities cohabitation offers for actively managing our/selves in relation to others within the field of romantic partnerships.

At this point it seems important to make explicit reference to one of the theoretical presuppositions that has underpinned this thesis: that is, the ultimate indeterminacy of the meaning of a signifier. As I have stated in earlier chapters, the meaning attributed to a particular signifier, in this instance 'cohabitation', represents a temporary settlement, the outcome of a discursive contest between individuals, and even within an individual, for pre-eminence. Shifts in context, or changes in subject positionings, frequently lead to the substitution of previously held meanings with new ones.

The following discussion is not dedicated to the provision of a conclusive definition of cohabitation in romantic terms. Instead, my interest lies with the implications, for the emotional heart of a relationship, of the adherence to one meaning of cohabitation rather than another.<sup>3</sup> As I consider this issue, I am mindful of the fact that both parties to a relationship may not share the same understandings, at the same time, of what it means to cohabit. Such differences can have profound consequences for how people feel, and how they act. And it is through such differences that relations of power are negotiated and renegotiated.

A common interpretation of cohabitation equates it with a 'trial marriage'. In an era of high divorce rates, a period of cohabitation is regarded by many to be a prudent step to take before engaging in the big event itself, an eventual wedding. It is hoped that through the experience of living together a serious error in judgement may be averted. Defined as a 'trial marriage', cohabitation gains its meaning from the courtship phase of the romantic narrative. As an optional episode within this

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<sup>3</sup> To some extent, the problem of negotiating the relational significance of cohabitation was canvassed in Chapter six.

narrative, cohabitation, in many contemporary western communities, has become part of the process of discovering whether or not you have found the 'right one'.

When heterosexual cohabitation is conceived of as a 'trial marriage', a forerunner to the 'real' thing, the romantic narrative appears incomplete. Marriage, construed as the conclusive episode of a good romance, remains forever beckoning, an act that is always available for uptake sometime in the future. Cohabitees are, as Michele's elderly Aunt put it, 'defective couples'. The people I interviewed often reported that family and friends regarded the romantic biographies of cohabitees as awaiting completion. Failing to engage in this final performance meant that the status of cohabitees' relationships was frequently the target of scrutiny, by both cohabitees and others.<sup>4</sup>

Attempting to deflect potential criticism of their decision to live together one couple — Jane and Michael — became engaged. The effectiveness of this particular strategy relies on two things: firstly, that the engagement leads to a reading of their relationship as one of 'trial marriage'; and secondly, that parents will be more accepting of living together when it is seen from this angle. While Jane and Michael's strategy of appeasement was minimally successful when they first began living together, its efficacy subsequently diminished as it became clear that their marriage was not just around the corner:

*Vivienne:* Do you think it [being engaged] has made others happier about you living with Michael?

*Jane:* Not really because we haven't got married. I mean that comes after getting engaged normally.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I explore this issue in Chapter six as I trace Olivia's selective use of marital discourse to achieve an enhanced sense of security in her relationship with Steve (see pp. 138–41).

<sup>5</sup> At the time that I spoke with Jane and Michael they had been living together as an 'engaged' couple for over four years.



Problematically, their engagement inadvertently signalled their willingness to comply at some point with social dictates. Viewed in this manner, their engagement merely provided family members and friends with an opening through which to exert further pressure on them to get married. Sometimes this pressure was applied during embarrassing episodes which had a particular impact on Jane:

*Vivienne:* It sounds like you are actually under quite a lot of pressure?

*Jane:* Yeah. Yeah. Especially from Michael's parents. And Geoff and Nicki more so than anybody.<sup>6</sup> ... It is just them two, them four I should say, that are always –

*Vivienne:* Do they make quite direct comments?

*Jane:* Mm mm. All the time. Really nasty sometimes actually. Like when David and Jessica got baptised we went along and we were sitting back at Janet's flat. And the minister – And what happened? What were we talking about? Oh how long Nicki and Geoff had been married. And Nicki turned around to us –

*Vivienne:* And the priest was there?

*Jane:* And the priest was there. 'How long had we been engaged?' and everything. And the fact that we were living together and everything. It was really embarrassing. I felt embarrassed because she was being quite open about it. I mean especially given that the priest was there. I really didn't know where to put myself. Because she really lowered, I don't know, she really pushed me into a corner basically. I didn't know what to say to her because she can be quite nasty.

Jane's embarrassment demonstrates a sensitivity to the discursive construction of cohabitation as amoral and hence a relational status that the priest, a representative of the church, would disapprove of automatically. Her sensitivity in this matter

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<sup>6</sup> The people who are mentioned in this extract are members of Michael's family. Their relationship to Michael is as follows: Geoff is Michael's older brother; Nicki is Geoff's wife; Janet is Michael's older sister; and David and Jessica are Janet's children.

also indicates the existence of a relationship of power between herself and the priest, one of the upshots of which is Jane's unwillingness to contest the power of marital discourse to define her relationship with Michael in deviant terms.

In the face of an almost constant stream of jibes and questions, Jane simply refused to capitulate. Frustrating the ambitions of those who exerted pressure on her, in particular Michael's family, provided Jane with a source of pleasure:

*Jane:* ...It [their disapproval] doesn't bother me. I think it makes me more determined not to get married in some cases. You know just to annoy them. 'Well blow it. They are not going to push me into it.'

Pregnancy, however, undermines Jane's willingness to maintain this stance. At this point, with the added consideration of a baby and intensified pressure, marriage gains an imperative it has formerly lacked.<sup>7</sup> Should Jane and Michael actually marry, the act will permit a retrospective reading of their period of cohabitation as a 'trial marriage'.

Promptings to get married at this juncture in the biography of the couple are primarily motivated by concerns over the issue of commitment and the provision of security for children. Despite all the evidence to the contrary, the dominant construction of marriage is of a permanent relationship. Thus, it is conceptualised as a bond that will guarantee that children will have a mother and a father. Marriage is, therefore, considered to be the ideal setting for children and the proper foundation of family life. In contrast, the dominant construction of cohabitation is of a temporary and unstable relationship that cannot provide the conditions of security that children need.

In the context of imminent child-birth, the emphasis is no longer on the celebration of new found love. There may even be some acknowledgment that the

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter five for a detailed discussion of how pregnancy and the birth of child can operate to install cohabiting women within a moral panopticon (pp. 111-3).

quality of love that exists between a couple has changed form, from the passionate high of being 'in love' to a more companionable 'loving'. Yet, even at this stage, marriage continues to signify that the romantic quest is not about to unfold again, at least not in the foreseeable future. And it is, in part, this aspect of the meaning of marriage that enables individuals to use marriage to convey their commitment to a relationship.

How cohabiting couples with children actually manage the marital question is dependent on a number of factors. Each person brings to the negotiating table their respective positions with regard to cohabitation and marriage; the positions they have adopted in relation to significant people in their lives, for instance parental figures and close friends; notions they have about the conditions that are necessary for creating a favourable emotional environment for child-rearing; and concerns either of them might have about normalcy and the possibility of encountering stigmatisation. The outcome of putting all of this into the proverbial cauldron is somewhat unpredictable, given the number of discursive locations that are relevant, their complexity, and the possibility that some of these positionings may also change during the negotiating process. Suffice to say that the issue was one that caused couples some consternation, especially if one person was keen to get married, or if both were ambivalent about marriage.

In Jane and Michael's case, pregnancy acted as a spur for them to consent to the idea of getting married, although they remained uncertain about when an actual wedding might take place. For Jane the decision in favour of marriage is the outcome of her resignation to family pressure, and her fear that remaining unmarried would be accompanied by detrimental effects for the baby:

*Jane:* ...I know that I am pregnant so for everybody else's sake (laughs) and for the baby's sake I think it's, I want to be, I mean I think it is safer to get married.

*Vivienne:* So you think you will probably get married?

- Jane:* Yeah. I mean I would quite like to stay like this forever (laughs). I mean it doesn't really mean anything to me because I know that Michael and I are committed to each other. And that is all that really matters to me. I don't really give, I mean I do care what other people think, but I think that now that we have a baby to think about I mean that is part of us— I mean, I know what it is like, you know, to be brought up in that kind of situation.
- Vivienne:* What sort of situation do you mean?
- Jane:* Well I don't know just society towards people I suppose— I don't really know what I am trying to say here. ...
- Vivienne:* Are you a bit worried that if you are not married that you will be frowned upon and your child will be frowned upon?
- Jane:* Right.

Jane's concession represents an attempt to normalise her living circumstances in order to avoid the moralising gaze associated with having a child outside of wedlock: she does not want her child to suffer the consequences of experiencing difference as deviance.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, Michael's anxieties seem to be fuelled by his desire to be the 'good man', and anchored by a concern to make visible his connection to their child:

- Vivienne:* I presume you've decided to get married?
- Michael:* I will get married.
- Vivienne:* When did that happen?
- Michael:* When we found out we were having a baby. I said, 'Well I suppose we better get married now.' We were always going to get married, but I had never really placed any importance on it. ... I still haven't thought about when we're going to get married. (two sentences later

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<sup>8</sup> Stephanie's response to her experience of having an ex-nuptial birth is discussed in Chapter five, pp. 111-3.

...) We'll have our baby and then once everything has settled down we'll decide when we are going to get married.

I think it is a security thing too.

(eight sentences later...)

*Vivienne:* Who is the security for?

*Michael:* Ah, I think for all three of us, for the baby as well. Like Jane and I said, 'When we go into hospital what are we going to have the baby under? Fletcher or Thomas?' She said, 'Oh, under your name.' And I said, 'That's fine.'

In a similar vein to the decision to become engaged, Michael inserts himself into the conventions of marriage even as he acts unconventionally. Believing that marriage will produce greater security for Jane and himself, and also 'the baby', Michael decides to marry Jane when she discovers that she is pregnant. He thereby recasts his period of cohabitation in non-resistant terms: it becomes a 'trial marriage'. Yet he departs from convention by delaying the wedding until after the birth of the baby. Despite this, Michael anticipates the patrilineal naming of their child. In this way, Michael simultaneously constitutes himself as someone who benefits from marital customs (like that of patrilineality), at the same time as he continues to resist aspects of the convention of marriage.

### III

In this section my focus is on how the definition of cohabitation as a stage in the romantic narrative affects the emotional terrain of the cohabiting relationship. Given this reading of cohabitation, which tends to operate in tandem with the construction of marriage as the romantic climax, I want to give consideration to the following questions: When is this reading of cohabitation put into play? By whom? Under what circumstances? What are the repercussions of its invocation for how

power is exercised in relationships? What discursive resources may be brought to bear to counter its effects?

I propose to attend to these questions through analysis of situations described during interviews with Barbara and Michele. In drawing on these examples I do not mean to convey that they set the limits of the possible ways in which this meaning of cohabitation can be utilised. I simply want to make a preliminary inquiry into a complex arena.

Barbara's discussion of her relationship with Matthew provides my first site for analysis. On the basis of Barbara's account it would seem that she and Matthew share a belief in the open-ended character of cohabitation. Operating with this shared belief Barbara and Matthew, nevertheless, occupy different positions with respect to cohabitation and marriage. Barbara's refusal to marry Matthew signifies her ambivalence about Matthew and their relationship. This is illustrated by the following exchange in which Barbara talks about her antipathy towards marriage:

*Vivienne:* So is marriage completely off the agenda?

*Barbara:* Yes. Yeah. I won't get married.

*Vivienne:* Do you ever think about it?

*Barbara:* Yeah, I would quite like to get married. He would quite like to get married. I think he feels a bit insecure. He feels that this means that I am not committed. Which is true. And I think if I was to say 'Let's get married,' he would like that.

(seven sentences later...)

But I don't really think about it because it is not a really a possibility for me. It is right off. It is just not something that I would do.

*Vivienne:* At the moment? In this particular relationship? Ever?

*Barbara:* Yeah. Ever. No, I think I am past that idea now. Although I said before I would do it if it was a matter of expediency. ... No, I don't want to get married. Maybe if we were talking about it with someone different, I don't know.

Barbara's responses to marriage are contradictory. She speaks ardently of her rejection of marriage. Yet marriage is also a desired state, something that she would 'quite like'. Her feelings (or lack thereof) for Matthew contribute to her opposition to marriage. Given this inflection, Barbara's refusal to get married could be read as an intention, or at least a willingness, to pursue a more pleasing romantic liaison should her current relationship founder or a better opportunity arise. In either case, Barbara would avoid the legal requirements of marital dissolution — a lengthy period of separation prior to divorce — and hence, she may well face one less hindrance to the unfolding of a new romantic quest.

In persisting to constitute her current relationship through the discourse of cohabitation, Barbara enforces their occupation of the gendered positions of courting. Matthew is thus repositioned as Barbara's suitor — a man who seeks the love of a woman — rather than her 'permanent' partner.<sup>9</sup> By keeping Matthew in the position of a would-be husband, Barbara establishes and maintains a relational dynamic that enables her to exercise power: as her 'suitor' Matthew is required to win Barbara's heart through endearments and favours (for example, an all expenses paid trip overseas). Matthew must woo Barbara and cannot take his presence in her life for granted.

Being constituted as a suitor in a relationship in which the other person resists marriage, but responds positively to being 'courted', is a position of vulnerability. Denied a definitive reply to their advances, the suitor is regularly confronted with the possibility of a final and absolute rejection. Ironically, Matthew's eagerness to close the cohabitational loophole through marriage consolidates his positioning as the 'suitor'. Renunciation of the position of the suitor, with all its attendant demands and uncertainties, could be achieved in one

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<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note the dictionary defines a 'suitor' in gendered terms as 'a man who courts a woman; wooer'. A 'wooer' is also laced with gendered connotations: a person who seeks the affection, favour or love of (a woman) with a view to marriage.

of two ways.<sup>10</sup> Matthew could rescind his invitation for Barbara to marry him, thereby signalling his own ambivalent feelings about their relationship. In such a scenario Barbara may, at this point, reveal more interest in the maintenance of the relationship than she has formerly displayed. Alternatively, Matthew might gain Barbara's consent to marry him. In both instances, the resulting shift in positions would bring about an alteration to how power is exercised in their relationship.<sup>11</sup>

My second example, drawn from Michele's interview, pursues a similar theme. My interest lies with what this conversation about marriage can tell us about the various meanings given to cohabitation (in contrast to marriage); and, how these meanings are utilised strategically, at various times, by particular people with noticeable effects.

While Barbara and Matthew shared the interpretation of living together as an extended form of courting, Michele and Tim have different views about the meaning of marriage, although Michele initially assumed they held similar beliefs. The existence of several different readings of the signification of cohabitation within the romantic discourse — for example, 'closure' or 'courting' — creates the possibility that one party will view their relationship in sexually exclusive terms while the other person remains willing to entertain the establishment of an alternative romantic bond. Indeed, this is the situation that Michele and Tim faced at one stage in their relationship. Here Michele reflects on this episode:

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<sup>10</sup> Of course there can be no guarantee that Matthew will continue to accept his positioning as the suitor. He may desire the relationship's longevity, but nevertheless take steps that might bring about its termination. Sensing its fragility he might opt to withdraw his affections in an effort to prompt Barbara to declare commitment to the relationship. Or this same tactic may be pursued as an act of self-preservation, a step to protect his vulnerability in the context of this relationship. In each case, while he might not achieve his preferred outcome he preserves a sense of himself as an agent (an actor) instead of someone who is acted upon, the proverbial victim.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter six for a discussion of a similar situation, this time in relation to Olivia and Steve.



*Vivienne:* Just to go over something that you touched on before, do you think your relationship would change if you were to get married?

*Michele:* ...Actually yes it probably would. This bit is personal, but a few years back we did go through a crisis. You do at points reconsider your relationship certainly, but this was a big one where a third person came along. And it was for Tim.

And at one stage in all this he said to me, 'If we had been married I wouldn't have looked at that person.' And I was absolutely astounded. I couldn't believe that he had said that. But I think that is a product of his upbringing really.

And I thought, 'Do I want to get married to keep him?' And I wanted to keep him, but I didn't want to get married.

And I still bear that in mind. I still have that in the back of my mind, that if I was married he wouldn't look at somebody else.

Operating with different interpretations of what living together means, Michele and Tim construct their relational status along different lines. For Michele cohabitation, no less than marriage, represents a successful end to the romantic quest. As a result, cohabitation is also bound by the principle of monogamy and ideally it is long-term. This element, in combination with the use of cohabitation to signal resistance to 'wifedom' leads, in Michele's eyes, to the superior ranking of cohabitation: it promises the best of both worlds. Sustaining this ranking of relational frameworks is reliant upon a shared understanding of cohabitation as a sexually exclusive and committed relationship. Yet when marriage is the socially ordained mechanism for symbolising the culmination of the romantic narrative the ability of cohabitation to undertake this function is constrained.

This is made evident by Tim's part in this story. Denoting a less committed relationship than marriage, cohabitation is readily aligned with flatting. For Tim, the meaning of cohabitation is equivocal. Speculatively, the following questions seem to be in order: Has Tim actually reached the 'happy ever after' stage with

Michele? Does he only await confirmation of this? Did Tim read Michele's rejection of marriage as simultaneously being a rejection of him? In which case, did he consider that he would be better off seeking an alternative and possibly more secure liaison? Therefore, did Tim still imagine that he was destined, despite his current relationship, to repeat his involvement in the romantic quest?

What ensued as a consequence of their different discursive constructions of cohabitation was Tim's openness to the exploration of a new romantic entanglement. In Michele's account of this incident, she indicates Tim's strategic utilisation of 'marital' discourse. Deflecting attention away from the part played by his desires, Tim defends himself by attempting to make Michele jointly culpable for his attraction to someone else by explaining it in terms of her choice for them to cohabit rather than marry. Tim's justification relies on discourses that privilege marriage. In so doing, he positions Michele as someone who must also take some responsibility for his actions.

As might be expected, the incipient development of such an entanglement precipitated a crisis in Tim's relationship with Michele. What was first and foremost at stake was the relationship's existence. But there was also the question of the form of any ongoing relationship. Underpinning this crisis was a contest over the place of cohabitation within the romantic narrative. If Michele had opted to get married, then Tim's perception of the ambiguity of cohabitation would have been upheld. The attraction of such a concession lies, as Michele points out, with its promise of safety and security. On the other hand her refusal to marry Tim, a much riskier practice, relies for its success on Michele's ability to persuade Tim that cohabitation can (and does) signify an ending to the quest for love and that this capability need not be reserved for marriage alone. Thus, the crisis caused by Tim's involvement with someone else acted as a stimulus to clarify the meaning of cohabitation. Cohabitation came to be discursively constructed on a joint basis as a long-term monogamous relationship.

## IV

The last two sections have dealt with cohabitation as a contested term within the discourse of romance. The symbolic potential of cohabitation is not, however, delineated by this discourse. Cohabitation may also be drawn on to symbolise resistance to romantic love. When used in this manner, cohabitation does not gain its meaning from being located, at points of dispute, within the discourse of romance. Instead, cohabitation is defined through its opposition to this discourse.

I want to begin my engagement with this issue by focusing once again on Michele. The excerpt which follows is part of a longer discussion with Michele that explores the impact of the disintegration of her parents' marriage on her own stance towards marriage.

*Vivienne:* How did that alter your own feelings about —?

*Michele:* Marriage? Well I suppose it just made me think that what could seem like an ideal situation, you can never predict. You can never say that I can love you forever until death do us part.

I don't know ... maybe there is no such thing as 'One man, one woman' which you are fed on as a child very much. (three sentences later...)

And this part doesn't worry my sister at all, but I know that marriage still does mean something to me. Like it is this ideal, but I don't believe it happens in reality and it probably never has. It is just that you couldn't get divorced in the old days. ...

So I probably still believe in it as a concept, but not in terms of real life. Because I think you can't make a promise to someone that you are going to love them forever and ever amen because there are too many things that influence lives. And I mean you could be here for fifty or sixty years after you have met and who can say what will happen in the future. (two sentences later...)

And so when you make a vow like in a marriage, to say something like 'I will love you blah blah,' to me I can't make it. It is the one promise

that is probably the most important one that you ever make in your life and I can't say what is going to happen. So I don't want to make that promise. I will probably feel a sense of failure if something did go wrong, so it is just better to say that I love you today and I hope I will tomorrow. And that is the end of that. I mean, why make a marriage out of it?

As she provides insights into the basis of her opposition to marriage, Michele also starts to elaborate on her sentiments about love. Her juxtaposition of love and marriage confirms the intertwining of these institutions: marriage implies the existence of love. While tied together through the discourse of romance, the demise of her parents' marriage causes Michele to become sceptical of both love and marriage. Michele refuses to participate in the wedding ritual because it symbolises life-long, committed love. The fallibility of the vow her parents made through marriage sets the stage for Michele's disillusionment with the enduring possibilities of 'love'.

Her scepticism suggests that she would offer more than a simple affirmative reply to the question posed by Stacey and Pearce: 'Have people in general "lost faith" in the power of love in a culture where one in three marriages ends in divorce and where princesses leave future kings to "go it alone"?' (1995:34). Michele believes in the concept of 'love', but has lost faith in the possibility of romantic love being realised. It is not the ideal that is problematic, rather, the difficulty, for Michele, lies in its flawed actualisation. Jackson's analysis of romantic love provides a particularly insightful elucidation of the complexity of Michele's position:

...romanticism and realism can coexist at different levels of our subjectivities. It is perfectly possible to be critical of heterosexual monogamy, dismissive of romantic fantasy and still fall passionately in love....

(Jackson 1995a:56)

Highlighting the unpredictable course of love, Michele's critique is directed at what Giddens calls the 'romantic love complex' (1992:61), even as this 'one-and-only', 'forever' version of love remains her ideal. In contrast, 'reality' is characterised by the existence of a more provisional and qualified love, a love subject to the vagaries of life. This kind of love, which Giddens refers to as 'confluent' love (1992:61), is signified through cohabitation.<sup>12</sup> In this rendition cohabitation, like 'confluent' love, is defined by contingency. The continuation of a cohabitational relationship is, therefore, dependent upon the sustainability of love and the endurance of mutual satisfaction: an unlikely prospect, some might say (Duncombe & Marsden 1995b:245). Cohabitation is predicated on constant negotiation and a degree of uncertainty, while marriage is constructed as a state of assumed stability although it is often experienced as uncertain.

Contradictions abound, however. Michele, in spite of her criticisms, retains a romantic view of love. Her cynicism does not dent her desire to be in love. This was underscored on two separate occasions in the interview. The first revelation occurs during Michele's discussion of her response to being pressurised by her 'mother-in-law' to get married shortly after she became pregnant with Emma:

*Michele:* ...And in a few, a few weeks later she did confront me and she said 'Will you get married?' And I said 'No.' And she asked me to explain why. ... I did try and tell her a little bit. But she just kept up with reasons why I could get round them and said things to me like, 'Love is a funny thing that starts off passionate and then over the years you become good friends.'

And I understand what she means. The first meeting of somebody is different from what happens later on. But I don't want to ever become a friend with Tim. I mean that is something different to me.

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<sup>12</sup> Although Giddens' project in *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992) is directed towards a consideration of emerging forms of practicing intimacy, he does not consider cohabitation, or the relationship between cohabitation and 'confluent' love.

Speaking about the widely observed transformation of the quality of love over time, Michele rejects the idea of maintaining a relationship with Tim that is based on the more pragmatic grounds of friendship and companionship alone: she resists her insertion within the discourse of companionate marriage. Instead, Michele's tie to Tim gains its pertinence from her passionate engagement with him, from 'love' rather than 'friendship'. Michele's romanticism is confirmed by her use of the term 'lover' to describe her relationship to Tim. While part of the rationale behind this choice lies with its explicitly sexual connotations, she states that it is also chosen because 'we are still in love'.

By placing passionate love at the core of her relationship with Tim, at the same time as she remains doubtful about the power of love to last, Michele evinces one of the tensions that riddles 'confluent' love. When passion is the condition upon which the endurance of a relationship rests, and passion is understood to dissipate over time, then the sustainability of a relationship becomes highly dubious. Given the construction of passionate love as a temporal state, and the rejection of 'friendship' as an alternative relational foundation, relationships are doomed to almost certain failure. Discursively constructed according to the precepts of 'confluent' love, relationships become fragile entities that come and go according to the tides of passion.

One of the ways of managing this contradiction is to displace the problems of love onto that of marriage. This is the strategy Philip adopts in his discussion about love and marriage. In the following extract (derived from a discussion about the expectations associated with marriage) he constructs marriage as a threat to love, it is the thing that puts love in jeopardy:

*Philip:* ...and being in love is a delicate thing. Remember when you fall in love, or you start falling in love, the whole thing is like falling in space. ... And it is so delicate that a puff of wind could blow the whole thing away. And if you get these social expectations and things starting to

hang onto the whole thing, it just pulls it down I am sure. It just slowly destroys it.

From this perspective marriage is a risky practice, a relational form to be avoided if you want to hold onto 'love'. Assigning the troublesome aspects of long-term heterosexual coupledness to marriage preserves the attractions of love. True love continues to be realisable as long as it is nurtured in relationships that are free from the fetters and constraints of moral convention. By constructing the dilemmas of heterosexual relationships in the nineties in this manner, the transient quality of love is simultaneously acknowledged and disregarded. Rather than abandon the project of finding love, marriage is jettisoned in the hope that in the absence of its hindrances it is possible for love to endure. What is sought after are relationships that endure because those involved are 'lovers', and not relationships which are sustained for reasons of convention despite the absence of 'love'.

These sentiments lend support to the claims Jackson makes concerning current investments in romance (1995a:59). Arguing against a reading of rising divorce rates, adultery and serial monogamy (and I might add cohabitation to this list) as suggestive of a disillusionment with romantic love, Jackson contends that the occurrence of things like divorce and adultery is indicative of 'a continued search for romantic fulfilment...' (1995a:59). It is the ongoing existence of romantic dreams that prompts people to abandon current relationships in favour of their renewal of the romantic quest. The widespread engagement in the rituals of classic romance suggests that romance is actually alive and well (Stacey & Pearce 1995:11). What is currently under siege are its institutional supports (Jackson 1995a:59).

In noting an increased turnover of relationships we may simply be observing the disruptive effects of the contradictions of romantic love, for within the discourse of romantic love lies the seeds of its own undoing (Jackson 1995a:59). The desire for a subject position within the discourse of romance is a product of the

emotional euphoria of falling in love and the capacity of love to transcend the monotony of everyday life. Yet the happily-ever-after part of the script often seems dull by comparison to the heady pleasures of 'being in love'; it 'lacks the excitement we prize' (Jackson 1993a:211). The routinization of love that occurs during the happily-ever-after stage breeds familiarity and 'familiarity strips away any sense of intrigue and mystery, and undermines the very basis of romance and eroticism' (Duncombe & Marsden 1995b:245; see also Hunter 1992:379-80; Jackson 1993a:211).

In the light of the preceding comments this reflection from Stacey and Pearce seems particularly apt:

If classic romance can be characterised as the quest for love delayed by a series of obstacles which desire must overcome, then postmodern romance might be conceptualised as the condition in which romance itself has become *the obstacle* which the desirable love relationship must overcome: surely everyone knows too much these days really to expect romance to last and has no-one to blame but themselves if they thought otherwise.

(1995:36-7)

## V

This chapter represents an excursion into the emotional world of cohabiting heterosexual couples. It examines the various significations given to cohabitation in relation to romantic love, commitment, and sexual exclusivity. By tracing the different meanings attached to cohabitation I have noted how 'cohabitation' is used strategically to construct the emotional terrain of coupled relationships. In pursuing this agenda I have elaborated on the various definitions given to 'cohabitation' by some of the cohabitees who participated in this study, and considered the implications of these definitions for how people are positioned within their relationships.



What are the consequences of reading cohabitation as a symbol of people's willingness to terminate a relationship should it cease to be gratifying? What does this mean for the levels of trust and security in a relationship? Is the implied threat contained within this understanding of 'cohabitation' drawn upon strategically as a counter-balance to other ways in which power is exercised, perhaps through money? What resources are brought to bear, by whom, with what effect, to counter the insecurity that might arise in this context? For example Matthew, shortly after I interviewed Barbara, deployed the material resources he had at his disposal to stage a shift in their residence from a small flat to a large villa in a desirable part of town. Was this an inducement for Barbara to stay in their relationship that could be enacted without exposing him to an obvious emotional risk?

Matthew's purchase of the house seems to confirm the gendered pattern that Duncombe and Marsden observed in conjunction with 'staging romance' (1995b). According to them, men tended to establish and maintain romantic connections with women through material means rather than emotional intimacies (Duncombe & Marsden 1995b:242-3). On the basis of this and other observations, Duncombe and Marsden make an argument for the existence of a gendered asymmetry in emotional behaviour within heterosexual relationships (Duncombe & Marsden 1993:223, 1995a:151, 1995b:246). This asymmetry is characterised by emotional distancing on the part of men which creates the appearance of invulnerability, while women are seen to be more emotionally reliant on their relationships for personal affirmation and fulfilment (Duncombe & Marsden 1993:225, 227 & 230, 1995a:159-60 & 165). Read through this lens, women are frequently positioned as emotionally needy beings who are highly invested in their relationships. And 'need', as I noted earlier, is a construct through which power is often exercised (see Duncombe & Marsden 1995a:158). In this context, gendered readings of 'invulnerability' and 'investment' can be critical to how power is distributed within a relationship.

men &  
women  
love

While I obviously share an interest in exploring how the emotional terrain is structured by gender, I am at odds with Duncombe and Marsden in many other respects. I am particularly critical of the way their analysis reproduces a gendered binary. All too frequently, they conflate the existence of gendered practices with actual 'women' and 'men'. If we accept unquestioningly their contention that women are more susceptible to romantic entreaties and more willing to engage in emotional disclosures, then the emotional world of heterosexual relationships will inevitably be structured by gendered power relations (Duncombe & Marsden 1993:233). Men and women will continue to position themselves, and each other, according to a gendered reading of the 'principle of least interest'.

Yet I suspect this reproduction of gendered dynamics does not mesh with the intentions of Duncombe and Marsden. Based on descriptions of expressions of emotion and intimacy between heterosexual couples, they argue that 'the search for intimacy and emotional reciprocity is the last frontier of gender inequality' (1995:165). Duncombe and Marsden are openly critical of this inequity, and clearly favour moves towards greater symmetry. Unfortunately, to establish their case Duncombe and Marsden produce corroborative rather than counter-intuitive readings. They point to the construction of heterosexual masculinity along non-emotional lines, but largely refrain from intervening in this alignment.

True to the spirit of my approach throughout this thesis, I would like to deconstruct their notion of a gendered asymmetry in order to introduce greater complexity. I think it is important to offer alternative readings of the emotional behaviours of men. Distancing (often achieved through workaholism) may not be indicative of invulnerability, but a response to feeling vulnerable, and hence a strategy invoked to produce a sense of safety. Read as a symptom of emotional neediness, rather than simple disinterest, it opens up the possibility of reconfiguring how power comes to be distributed along the axis of emotional need.

Rather than simply surmising the meanings of particular actions together with their emotional significations, as I have done above, what is urgently required is in-depth research, similar in style to the work undertaken in this thesis, that explores how the emotional fabric of the lives of heterosexual couples is constituted. What positions do men and women adopt in relation to the 'emotional'? Is this territory demarcated according to gender, and how? If gender is used to structure the emotional terrain (and Duncombe and Marsden argue that it is), what impact does this have on who gets to openly express which emotions within relationships? Are practices pertaining to finances and household chores used to signify feelings of love, care and appreciation? Who reads actions within the financial arena, and/or domestic sphere, in an emotional light? And what readings do they produce? What are the implications of these readings for who gets to feel wanted, secure, and powerful? How might the emotional terrain be revisioned in order to make it more likely for emotional equality to exist? These are just a few of the questions that need to be addressed.

## CONCLUSION

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The discursive debates aired within this thesis form part of the contested terrain of personal relationships in the late twentieth century. In particular, I have been interested in the strategic deployment of resources — discursive and material — to produce identities and practices that resist the gendered norms prescribed for heterosexual couples. It is noteworthy that the process of producing resistant identities and practices is reliant upon a combination of discursive and symbolic manoeuvres. For instance, the cohabitees that feature in this study drew on a range of other discourses ('flattering' discourse, for example) to mould their relational identities and practices. Their management of resistance also entailed the utilisation, at various points, of discursively constructed differences, for example the differences between heterosexual cohabitation and marriage.

The people with whom I spoke deliberately sought to disrupt the normative assumptions of heterosexual coupledness. Prompted by their analysis of marriage as a relational practice that is inescapably characterised by gender power relations, most of the cohabitees who participated in this study resisted their insertion within marital discourse, even as they adopted some of its conventions. In spite of their (apparent) concessions, they continued to represent themselves as resistant actors

through the deployment of oppositional symbolic markers, of which cohabitation constitutes a prime example.

I have referred to this process of active engagement with discursive constructs as 'managing selves'. Like the foucauldian rendition of the term 'subject', 'managing selves' has a doubled character. It implies both the active and repeated constitution of one's identities, even as these identities are constituted for us by other people within everyday settings. In the context of this research, I have focused on the management of a heterosexual, relational self. This has involved paying particular attention to discourses of resistance, cohabitation and marriage. I have not only examined the simultaneously enabling and constraining effects of particular discourses, but also commented on how power is exercised within specific social contexts through the ascription of meaning. This form of the exercise of power prompted some of the people who participated in this study, on a number of occasions, to foreground alternative identities.

The production of detailed accounts through in-depth interviewing has enabled me to attend to the meanings that the people within this study have attributed to their relational practices. A careful examination of people's reasons for making particular choices ruled out the possibility of producing simplistic accounts of cohabitation. Instead, analysis of the interviews has focused on the presence of complexity and contradiction within the narratives generated during the interviews. Theoretically, the observation that everything is not always as it seems has led me to argue that acts of compliance may have resistant undercurrents, just as strategies of resistance may be more symbolic than actual. Put succinctly, resistance tends to co-exist with moments of compliance, and vice versa. For example, in Chapter eight I discussed Rebecca's compliance with a gendered division of household tasks even as she uses gendered ideas about housework to resist the expansion of her workload into masculinised tasks like painting. In this chapter I also examine Jonathon's multiple positionings. Jonathon resists social conventions by choosing to cohabit rather than marry. At the same

time as he and Paula have settled on a conventional division of paid and unpaid work which sees him in full-time paid employment while Paula looks after their child.

The simultaneity of resistance and compliance is a major focus of this research. In examining the use of cohabitational discourse to construct resistant identities and practices, I have also highlighted the presence of ambiguities, inconsistencies and contradictions in the narratives of those who participated in this study. Some readers might consider that these features are indicative of the failure of cohabitation as a strategy of change, or more seriously, the failure of the people who participated in this study to figure out how to produce egalitarian relationships (see Schwartz 1994:2). In contrast, I have produced a vastly different interpretation of contradiction and inconsistency that looks to the existence of multiple selves and multiple meanings for its explanatory power. As multiple selves, people may experience a clash of desires and wishes that prove irreconcilable. Living out the terms of their discursive constitution in one discourse may lead them to contravene their constitution in another discourse. Symbolic markers of resistance, like housework strikes or independent money management, provide an avenue for reconciling these tensions because they permit the continued representation of the self in resistant terms. Multiple selves aside, the meaning given to any identity or practice can vary from context to context. Cohabitees are not the ultimate arbiters of how cohabitation is defined or positioned in relation to marriage. Confronted with 'negative' appraisals of cohabitation, the people who participated in this study responded in a variety of ways: some sought to align cohabitation with marriage by minimising the significance of marriage itself, 'it is just a piece of paper'; others wore gold rings on the fourth finger of their left hand to encourage a recognition of themselves as 'married'; several presented themselves as 'single' individuals. In so doing, they not only confounded the discursively constructed boundary between cohabitation and marriage, they also seemed, from the perspective of humanist versions of the self, to be acting inconsistently.

The substantive focus of this research, people who have deliberately sought to disrupt the gendered conventions of traditional marriage, is shared by VanEvery (1995a, 1995b). VanEvery, however, approached her research in a very different manner. I have sought to make visible the tensions that surround attempts to change heterosexual relationships, and I have problematised the 'new'. VanEvery, on the other hand, delineates the strategies used by people as they seek to create anti-sexist households, yet she does not subject these strategies to detailed scrutiny. As a result, the pitfalls of 'new' household arrangements remain largely hidden from view. Furthermore, VanEvery tends to paint a straightforward picture of the participants in her study: they appear as non-conflictual actors.

Although I have attended to lifestyle rather than sexual aspects of heterosexual relationships, the orientation of this thesis is consistent with the recently articulated agendas of Hollway (1993), Segal (1994) and Smart (1996a, 1996b). These authors point to the need to resist unitary descriptions of heterosex that inevitably characterise these relationships as oppressive. My adoption of the motif of 'managing' meshes with my (and their) contention that women within heterosexual relationships can and do resist their insertion within gender power relations. The foregrounding of acts of agency, however, is not meant to convey the absence of constraint. Heterosexual women are not free to determine the configuration of their relationships with their male partners: they/we are simply not that powerful, although they/we are certainly not powerless.

Hollway, Segal and Smart argue for the importance of paying attention to the meanings people give to their actions, and the actions of others. Although their recent writings are peppered by the occasional personal anecdotes, their analyses are primarily located within current theoretical debates.<sup>1</sup> This thesis, however, can be described as a theoretically informed examination of people's talk about their

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<sup>1</sup> Hollway's earlier work (1984, 1989), in contrast, contained a heavy focus on interview material.

relationships, which distinguishes it from a number of the other contemporary commentaries on heterosexual relationships (Kitzinger, Wilkinson & Perkins 1992; Segal 1994; Jackson 1996a, 1996b; Smart 1996a). It is through the detailed attention to interview texts that I offer a particular contribution to the debates within this field.

## I

In analysing the talk of the cohabitees who participated in this research I have been especially attentive to the implications of emergent practices, like cohabitation or independent money management, for how power is exercised. Such practices, as I have shown, whilst pursued for emancipatory reasons, can actually set the stage for the re-emergence of gender power relations, albeit in different guises. In other words, emergent practices are not without risks or pitfalls.

There are several consequences of this approach to emergent practices for the work laid out in this thesis. Firstly, it prompts a re-examination of the claim made by the cohabitees within this study for the inevitable superiority of cohabitation over marriage. In addition to rendering the relationship between these two relational forms in more complex terms, deconstructing the opposition between cohabitation and marriage encourages a re-appraisal of the strategic benefits of 'marriage'. In so doing, it opens up a whole raft of possibilities for negotiating heterosexual coupledness that the discourse of marriage resistance precludes. Through this revisioning the possibilities for negotiating heterosexual coupledness are broadened beyond those stipulated by the discourse of marriage resistance. A personal example might suffice as an illustration. Contemplating how I might participate in another long-term heterosexual relationship I have been attracted to the potential marriage offers to symbolise love and connection. Yet I



can only imagine availing myself of this cultural symbol in the context of separate households, not of co-residence.

The preceding statements should not be read as a straightforward recuperation of marriage. Instead, I would like to suggest that both marriage and cohabitation should be regarded as risky practices. By this I mean that the acceptance of a position within either discourse tends to be accompanied by unforeseen consequences. It is not possible, therefore, to argue for the superiority of one form of heterosexual coupledness over the other. To attempt to do so involves an assumption that the implications of these relational forms are not subject to contextual fluctuations. 'Cohabitation' and 'marriage' present different opportunities for strategic engagement in the terrain of heterosexual coupledness. Furthermore, as I have illustrated within this thesis, the insertion of an individual into either relational discourse does not prevent them from borrowing constructs and symbols from the other discourse, either to refashion the terms of their relationships or to engage in the strategic representation of themselves and their relationships.

The risky character of cohabitation and marriage is attributable, in part, to the existence of multiple meanings for both relational practices. Under these circumstances, individuals, as I have consistently argued, are unable to guarantee the definition that is in force within any particular context, at any particular moment. So, for example, the acceptance of a position within marital discourse exposes individuals to the risk of being subjected to regulatory pressures derived from more conservative versions of that discourse. For Olivia this might entail an expectation that she assumes even greater responsibility for the domestic sphere because she has become a (house)wife.

Similarly, despite contrary practices, the discursive construction of the cohabitational relationship carries with it an implicit agreement to separate ownership of property. This reading of cohabitants' relationships is reinforced by current legislation that excludes cohabiting individuals (both heterosexual and

homosexual) from a number of legal protections that become particularly relevant when a relationship falters either through separation or the death of one partner. Barbara may desire to divest herself of any symbols of commitment, including shared material possessions, but if her relationship to Matthew were to end, the consequence of cohabiting is that she has no legitimate basis for claims to property he has acquired during their relationship. Any decision to end this relationship would mean that she would be considerably worse off materially.

The assertion that emergent practices, like independent money management or cohabitation, are both fraught and flawed (in short, that they are risky) should not be taken as an indicator of their failure as strategies of change, rather it is suggestive of the need to revise ideas about the process of social transformation. Based on the contention that relational practices are by definition risky, I would like to argue for an understanding of change in non-linear terms for several reasons. To begin with, people's multiple constitution produces them as contradictory agents of change. Simultaneously located in both progressive and conservative discourses, people's actions are seldom unambiguously orientated towards the formation of gender neutral relationships. In addition, new discourses, like that of cohabitation as marriage resistance, are products of the creative reworking of a number of already existing discursive practices, including marriage. Traces of the 'old' are intermeshed with the 'new'. Change is, therefore, not characterised by clear and unequivocal ruptures, but by mergers and leakiness. Lastly, in being confronted with the undesirable consequences of one discursive location, people often re-evaluate the strategic benefits of alternative discursive practices, including those that they might have previously rejected. Under these circumstances, change is best typified as a cyclical process that proceeds via initiatives, re-appraisals, further initiatives, and so on. Almost inevitably, each attempt to institute change establishes the need for subsequent changes in order to counter the deleterious effects of previous initiatives.

Although this research has largely focused on the implications of various meanings for how relationships are configured, initiatives for change always take place within particular social contexts. Clearly, some social settings make access to symbolic markers of egalitarianism easier than others. Amongst the social arenas that might be considered crucial are those pertaining to the provision of affordable child-care; social policies that support independent access to financial resources irrespective of employment or partnership status; employment practices including the establishment of 'family friendly' work places; labour market policies, for instance pay equity provisions that minimise the gap in earnings between women and men; and economic conditions that foster full employment. Each of these arenas constitutes an important site for further inquiry and intervention. Without the implementation of equity provisions in these sites, the ability to rewrite the practices of heterosexual coupledness is circumscribed. It is not possible, for example, to maintain a system of independent money management without having ongoing access to an independent source of money. Present policies on state funded benefits mean that women (and men) in heterosexual partnerships who forgo paid work to look after children must look to their partners for financial support. Although the state mandates the transfer of income between heterosexual couples, it has consistently failed to take heed of Kate Sheppard's call, in the late nineteenth century, for each partner to have access, as of right, to half of the couple's income (Sheppard [1899] 1989).

## II

Given the multifaceted and constantly shifting character of the dynamics of intimate relationships, future research in this field needs to broaden the range of relational aspects that it considers and contemplate the interpenetration of these aspects with each other. As I argued in Chapter nine, a focus on emotions,

including the emotional significance attached to actions within other realms, seems of especial relevance. Within this domain, I believe that work that examines people's talk about relational conflict would produce new insights into the role that gender plays in the constitution of heterosexual power relations. Some of the material I gathered during the process of this study indicated that recourse to gendered constructions, of ir/rationality for example, are often made to settle contests over whose perspective will get to count as the representation of 'reality' at that point in time. Such work would undoubtedly benefit from attention to the ways in which gender is used to signify relations of power (Scott 1988b:42-5; see also Haste 1994). Similarly, I anticipate that foucauldian ideas about the exercise of power through 'truth' would prove very useful for the analysis of this material (Foucault 1980; Flax [1987] 1990, 1992).

This study has focused on a small number of people, most of them critical of the institution of marriage. The frame of this study could be productively widened, in the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand, to emerging and potentially innovative forms of coupled relations and could involve interviews with a wider range of couples: homosexual and heterosexual; married and unmarried; co-residing and those who live separately. Like the research I have undertaken, I envisage that such a study would consider how people create resistant narratives about themselves, even as they conform to dominant scripts of how to engage in the practices of coupledness. Not only would this work provide insights into what things get to count as symbols of resistance and normalcy, it would also highlight similarities and differences across these categories. For some lesbian couples the only characteristic that distinguishes them from nuclear family households may be their sexual orientation. In this scenario, sexuality may be installed as a marker of resistance to normative pressures. The outcome of this more extensive project would be an increased awareness of the way in which symbols of resistance both alter over time and change contextually.

Through the detailed examination of interview texts the work contained within this thesis offers insights into the identities and practices associated with heterosexual coupledness. It explores the advantages of 'new' ways of resolving some of the dilemmas that arise when couples choose to co-reside. At the same time, it considers the dangers and pitfalls of these 'new' practices. Discourse analysis, in this instance, is not simply an intellectual exercise. Significantly, it offers readers an opportunity to reconsider the practices they engage in and the identities they assume as a consequence of their participation in intimate relationships.

## RESEARCH APPENDIX

This appendix outlines the practical steps taken to produce the analyses of the interview material which features in this thesis.

In some ways, it is possible to argue that the job of analysis started the moment I began the process of transcription, for in choosing to transcribe without recording pauses, hesitations, or emotional tone, the likelihood that I would take heed of Anne Opie's (1988, 1992) analytic recommendations was greatly diminished. As I transcribed the interviews, I gave thought to how I might proceed with the task of analysis. Initially, I tried to identify the presence of recurrent themes. Although this approach has been used successfully by a number of other qualitative researchers I quickly discarded it, having found this particular manner of analysing interview texts both singularly unhelpful and incongruent with my theoretical orientation: in pursuing themes I ran the risk of producing decontextualised and reductionist accounts of people's talk.

The decision not to use the only widely available computer program at the time, NUDIST, was conditioned by questions of access and computer compatibility: these issues meant that my exploration of its utility was cursory. My current knowledge of NUDIST would suggest that it might have some value in the retrieval of interview material, but that its effectiveness relies upon the ability of the researcher to establish appropriate categories and sub-categories. Having located relevant text, the task of contemplating the significance of the meanings contained therein would remain.

At this stage, I also explored writings by New Zealand sociologists and psychologists. I considered Anne Opie's work (1988, 1992), noted how Victoria Grace (1989) engaged in discourse analysis, and studied how Nicola Gavey (1989) had

analysed interview texts. My response to each of these analytic approaches was conditioned by my theoretical orientations and research agendas. Like Opie, I was interested in paying attention to multiplicity and inconsistency. But unlike Opie, one of the purposes of noting the presence of these features lay with what they indicated about how power (in the foucauldian sense) was exercised and resisted. Discourse analysis, according to Grace, leads to the production of a meta-discourse, a distillate of the key words and phrases used by research participants to narrate a particular episode or activity. The emphasis on commonalities within this version of discourse analysis did not fit with my concern with differences: differences in context and meaning, and differences within and between people. Such an approach also seemed to be unable to further my thinking about agency. The theoretical underpinnings of Gavey's work, however, were similar to those I had adopted. Her analysis of interviews provided a starting point for the development of my own analytic procedures. I shared with Gavey an interest in exploring the implications of how discourses constituted subjects and their relationships to each other. However, I departed from Gavey by contemplating how people sought to actively manage their discursive locations: as I have already stated, I wanted to explore the issue of agency for the postmodern sub/ject.

Finally, having studied these examples of interview analysis, I simply began to immerse myself in the texts of each interview. I spent hours reading and rereading them. This immersion allowed me to gain a great deal of familiarity with the details of each interview. I could, in discussions with my principal supervisor, recall who said what about a particular issue and how they said it. At this time, I used 'Filemaker pro' (a computer program) to break the interview texts into smaller portions that I subsequently commented on and discussed. The advantage of 'Filemaker pro' (over a

word-processing package) lay with the capacity it offered to format the page in a regular fashion.

During this early analytical work on the interview material, I paid particular attention to the use of pronouns like 'we', 'I', and 'they'. I noted when the use of a pronoun produced categories of inclusion or exclusion, and considered the social implications of this way of drawing boundaries. I attended to how cohabitees within this study constructed their relational 'we'. Did they think this was different to the marital 'we'? If they did, in what way was it different and how was this difference made apparent? I also read the interviews for significant statements that provided insights into what cohabitation and marriage meant to those with whom I spoke and to the people with whom they interacted. Were these relational forms contrasted or aligned with each other? Who saw cohabitation and marriage as distinctive or similar relational forms, and under what circumstances? What were the markers of the similarities or differences between cohabitation and marriage? Which definition prevailed within a specific context? What did this indicate about how power was exercised and about how subjectivities were constituted?

Posing these questions prompted an interest in how things were said, rather than in how frequently they were said. I took note of the juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory statements and explored how people negotiated their conflictual positionings. In many ways, the analysis of the interviews was a highly interpretive exercise that necessitated the location of signifiers within discourses. As a result, it is entirely possible that another reader would have given these signifiers a different discursive location, and hence attributed a different significance to them.



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